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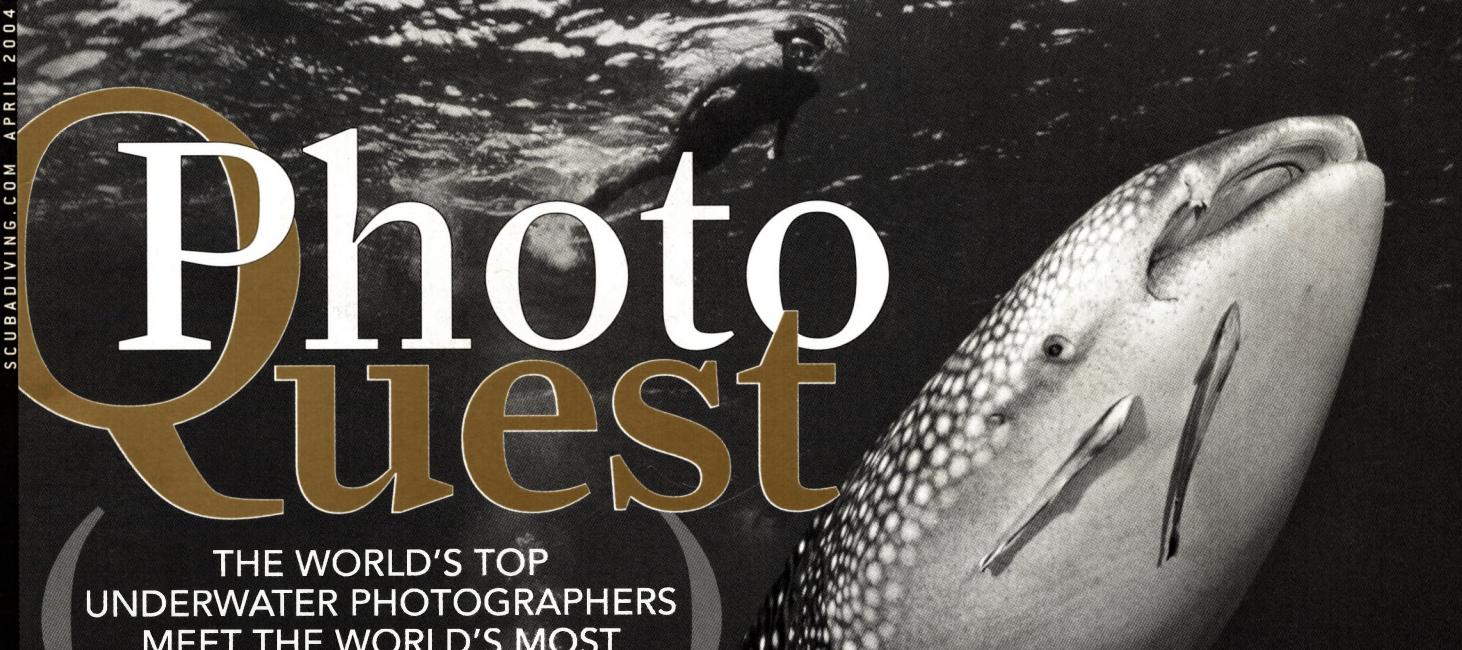


Photo Quest

THE WORLD'S TOP
UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS
MEET THE WORLD'S MOST
SPECTACULAR SUBJECTS

PERFECT ASCENTS

How to have a
happy ending
on every dive

KEEP IT DRY

9 bags and boxes
built to keep the
water out

Dive Cozumel Like
A Veteran, p. 36

BAILOUT BOTTLES TESTED

Which ones get
you back to the
surface safely?

APRIL 2004

Snorkeler, diver,
whale shark and
photographer come
together at Thailand's
Richelieu Rock.

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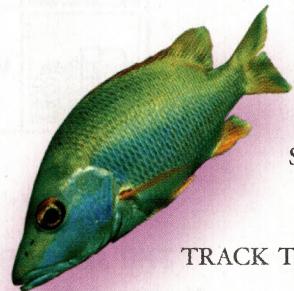
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*You're not
dreaming
You're in
Puerto Rico*

PLUNGE INTO A PANORAMA OF EXOTIC

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SWIM AMONG SCHOOLS OF ANGELFISH,

TRACK THE HUNDRED-FOOT DROP OF A MASSIVE WALL,

EXPLORE IMMENSE GARDENS OF STAGHORN, ELKHORN,

GIANT BRAIN CORAL, AND THE EXTREMELY RARE BLACK CORAL.

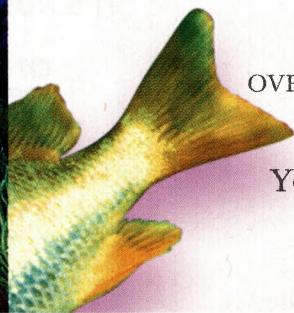
JOURNEY THROUGH A MAZE OF ANCIENT CAVERNS, ALLEYWAYS, AND

TUNNELS. SPY ON AN OCTOPUS. FOLLOW A SEA TURTLE. THEN AFTER

SUNDOWN, SIT BACK TO AN EXQUISITE DINNER BY CANDLELIGHT

OVERLOOKING THE WAVES. SEEM LIKE PARADISE?

YOU'RE NOT DREAMING - YOU'RE IN PUERTO RICO.



TALK



(EDITOR'S NOTE)

How Has Diving Changed Your Life?

Tell us, and we might share your story with the rest of the world.

AS MUCH AS YOU MIGHT LOVE IT, you can't argue that diving is a convenient pastime. You can't wake up on a Saturday morning and decide to go for a 45-minute dive before the kids wake up, as you can with bicycling or running. You can't call a friend to meet you in 10 minutes for a quick fix, like you can with basketball or tennis or golf. To stay active in diving, you've got to commit some money, some time and some effort in planning.

So why do we do it? For lots of reasons, very few of which have to do with the simple mechanics of breathing under water. Like any personal passion, scuba diving leads to bigger things and, at the risk of sounding like a second-rate self-help guru, I would argue that, most often, it's a way for us to learn something about ourselves.

For many, it's a way to connect with friends and family and to forge new, unexpected relationships. For others, it's about the journey into an otherwise inaccessible world. And for others, it's about overcoming fears and attaining personal goals. Whatever your reasons, I want to hear your story. I want to hear about the extraordinary friendship that started on a dive boat. I want to hear about the incredible odds you overcame to make your dream dive. I want to hear the tale of how diving opened your eyes to a new realm of possibilities that sent you down an unexpected career path or on a voyage of self-discovery.

In short, I want to know how diving has changed your life and the lives of other divers you know. And I want to share the best stories with our readers. To tell us your story, go to www.scubadiving.com/lifechange. We'll choose the most incredible and inspiring stories to feature in an upcoming article. Shouldn't one be yours? —BUCK BUTLER

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(HOT TOPIC)

THE THINGS THEY CARRY

What do you have in or on your BC? — IADIVER

Typically, I'll have an extra pair of snips and a small knife in a holster clipped inside one of the pockets, a snap ring for my console, and a patch of Velcro for my AIR 2. — DIVEBUM EMT shears, dive knife and small light in one pocket. — JHINDS Sausage, foldable snorkel, writing slate, whistle and reflector. — NOLATOM Two backup lights on shoulder straps, shears on waist, surface marker buoy, spool, reel when needed for planned penetration, and a whistle on left shoulder under the inflator. —

JETFINFAN Two penetration reels on back, lock-knife on retractor on right shoulder, small knife on left pull strap, spare mask in pocket. — MSR Shears, DAN tag, light. — SBRDVR Two safety sausages, two air horns, an old CD to be used as a reflector. — SCFRAN A shoulder carabiner to clip my mask to between dives; two other carabiners on the zipper pockets as nice big zipper pulls; a climbing-grade carabiner on the retractor to use as a tank banger. —

ZOTTERS

Want to join the discussion? Log on to www.scubadiving.com and click on "Community."

(LETTERS)

Weeki Wachee, Wink Wink

I HAVEN'T BEEN TO WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS since I was a sixth-grader on a weeklong Florida vacation with my parents, 17 years ago. If I thought of it at all, I'm sure I assumed that the old roadside attraction had gone the way of all slightly rickety establishments in the Disneyfied Sunshine State. Thanks for your article ("Fountain of Youth," March '04) about Weeki Wachee and the difficult task of keeping the park open in changing times. It was

a pleasure reminiscing about a forgotten moment from my childhood and a beautiful mermaid who—I swear!—winked right at a 12-year-old boy on the back row of the underwater theater. **Louis Burroughs, Chillicothe, Ohio**



(HOW TO REACH US)

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(ONLINE)

Show Us Your Photos

If the Photo Quest feature in this issue (see p. 58) inspires you to take a camera along on your next dive, don't forget to submit your best shots for ScubaDiving.com's Photographer of the Week. Each week, we feature the work of one underwater photographer. Sometimes it's a professional, sometimes it's a divemaster, but usually it's a diver like you who has amassed a collection of great images. Go to ScubaDiving.com and click on "Photography" to check out our archived galleries and find inspiration for your underwater photo session.

We'll Keep Thinking, So You Don't Have To

I AM CONTINUALLY IMPRESSED by the amount of resources your magazine devotes to equipment reviews, in terms of time, money and serious thought. Your recent review of weight-integrated BCs (March '04) is a case in point. With all the bells and whistles available on today's models, it never occurred to me that I should know whether the deflate valve on my BC can exhaust air faster than the inflator can add air to the bladder. Thanks for thinking of tests for such crucial performance characteristics, so I don't have to. As with all major pieces of gear, I wouldn't think about making a purchase without consulting the results of your ScubaLab tests first. Keep up the good work. —**Chris Thurman, White Plains, N.Y.**

XS Scuba Buys IDI

IN YOUR REVIEW of weight-integrated BCs, I saw a write-up on the International Divers Advantage. My local dive store tells me they're out of business. What gives? —**Adam Laramie, Atlanta, Ga.**

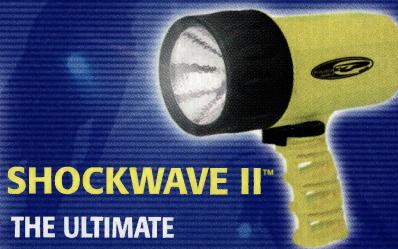
It's true. Shortly after the BC review went to press, International Divers, Inc. closed its doors. The bank holding IDI's loan foreclosed on the company's assets and on Feb. 10 (just as this issue went to press) sold them to XS Scuba, Inc. of Santa Ana, Calif. According to a press release, XS Scuba's plans involve "integrating the IDI product offering to become a full-line supplier to the dive industry." For further information contact XS Scuba at (866) 977-2822 or visit their website at www.XScuba.com.

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58

Want to get this close to manta rays and 15 other great underwater photo subjects? We'll tell you exactly where to go.



58 Photo Quest With the help of top underwater photographers, we search the world for the most photogenic creatures the oceans have to offer. From the whale sharks of Australia to the manta rays of Mexico's Socorro Islands to the manatees of Crystal River, our 20-page photo exclusive features 16 must-dive experiences.

INSTRUCTIONAL

95 Perfect Ascents A safe, open-water ascent with no line is tricky business. We'll show you how the pros keep it all under control. *By John Francis*

54 World's Best Shore Dives

Declare your freedom from diesel fumes, early morning boat departures and the stomach-churning effects of *mal de mer*. Walk-ins are always welcome at these 10 shore diving hot spots, as selected by more than 6,000 readers of *Scuba Diving*.

LESSONS FOR LIFE

78 River Blindness Lost in the channel of a black-water river and separated from your dive buddies as a massive barge comes barreling down right on top of you—could you survive? *By Michael Ange*

Cover photo by Mark Strickland.



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THE GREAT DIVES

17 GOLDEN SWEEPERS at Cannibal Rock off Indonesia, mobs of black-striped salema at Kicker Rock in the Galapagos Islands and ethereal passageways at The Chimney in the British Virgin Islands.

CURRENTS**24 CAN WHALES GET BENT?**

British scientists search for a connection between high-volume sonar and apparent cases of decompression sickness in beaked whales. **PLUS:** Bonefishing in Belize, a coral-friendly license plate in Florida and grouper protection in the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas.

GEAR**85 DRY BAGS AND BOXES**

We found nine bags and boxes that keep your clothes dry while you get wet.

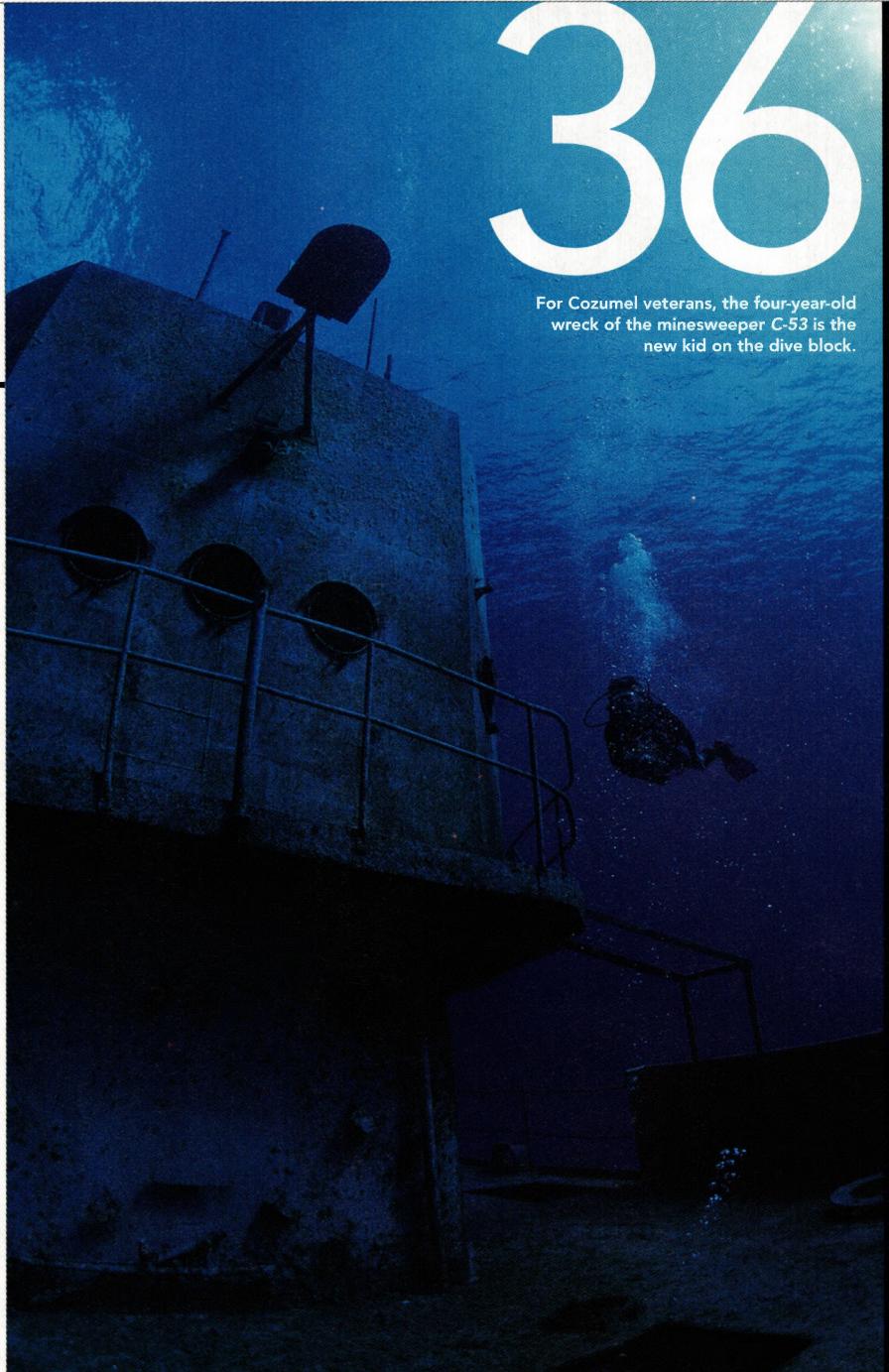
91 BAILOUT BOTTLES In an out-of-air emergency, what would you give for a few more breaths?

TRAINING

100 THE QUICK FIX Simple precautions and quick first aid can keep underwater cuts, scrapes, bites and stings from ruining your dive.

102 PENETRATING QUESTIONS

Wreck diving poses special hazards to divers of all skill levels, but with proper training, techniques and equipment, there are few vessels you can't explore.



For Cozumel veterans, the four-year-old wreck of the minesweeper C-53 is the new kid on the dive block.



36 DIVE COZUMEL LIKE A VETERAN See what makes this island irresistible to legions of travelers who would rather dive here than anywhere else in the world.

43 DRIVE & DIVE Every wreck in the Great Lakes has a story that's waiting to be told. Do your part by reliving the history of 10 popular recreational dives.

3 TALK 51 DIVE DEALS 104 IN DEPTH 112 LOOK



JOB DESCRIPTION:
SAVE THE PLANET.

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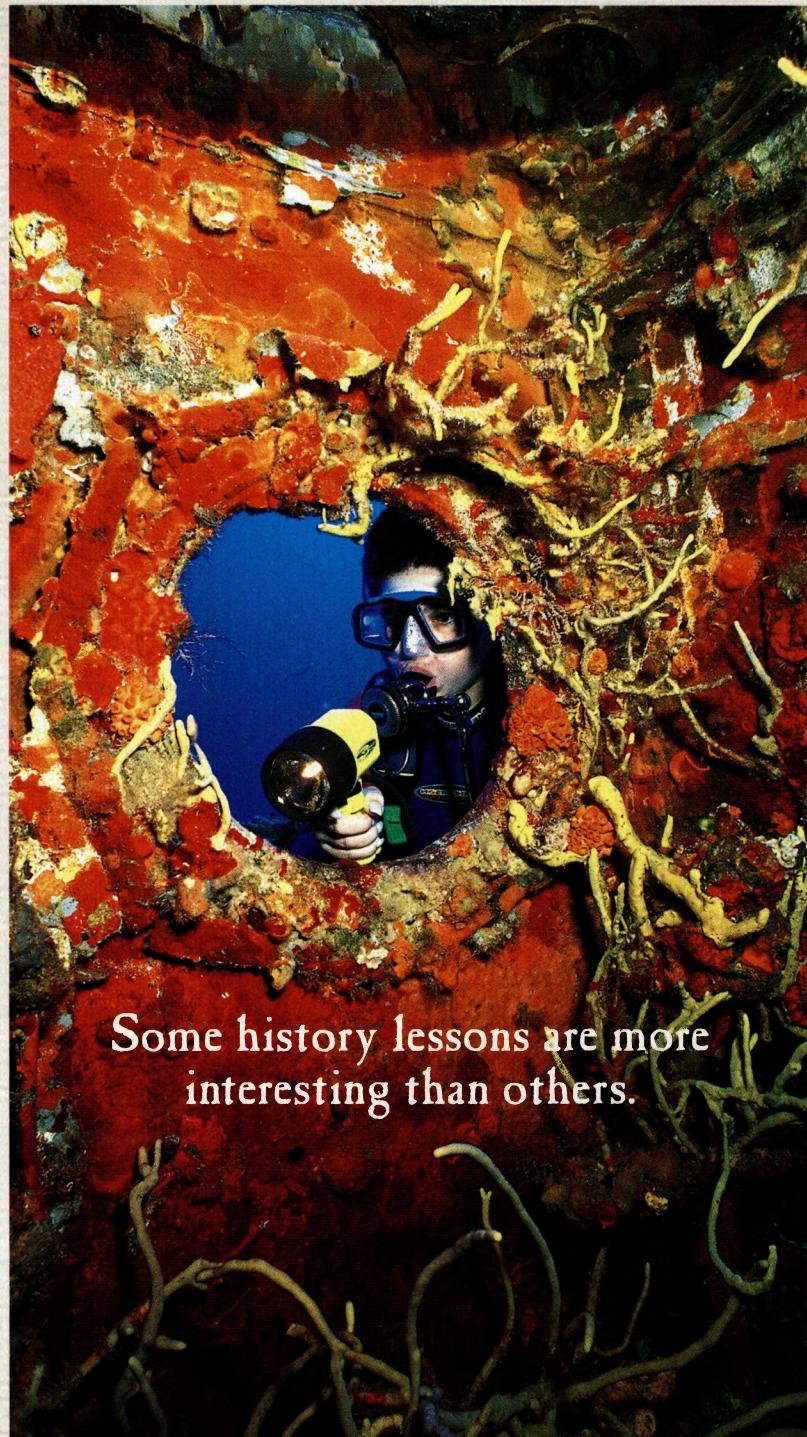


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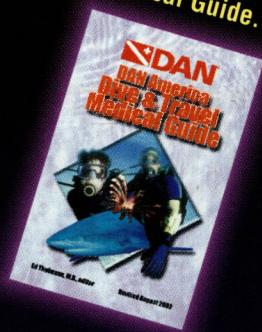
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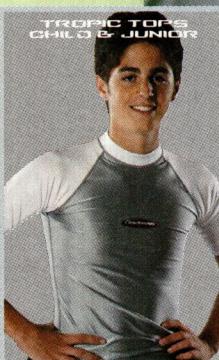
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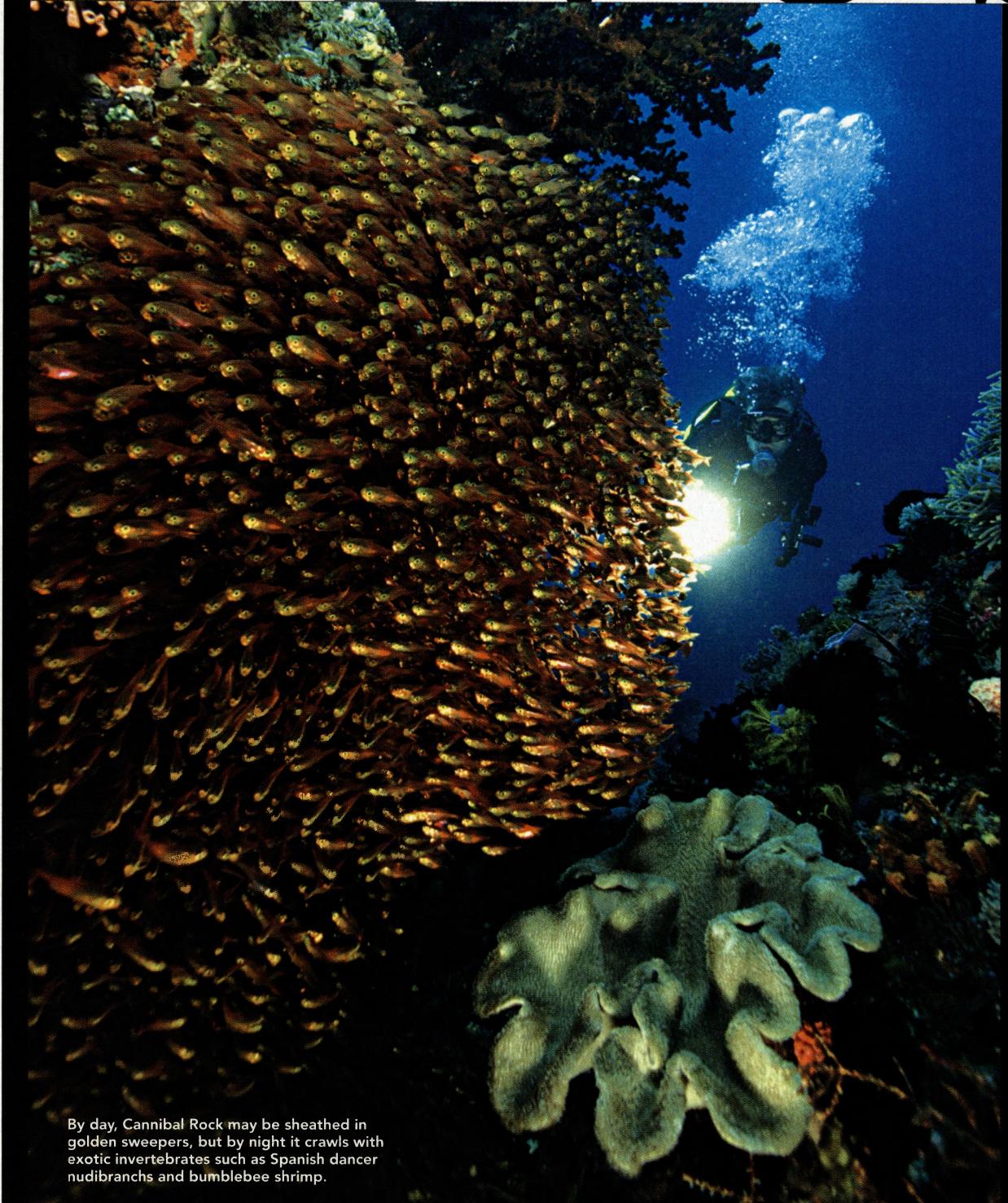
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Dives

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CANNIBAL ROCK, INDONESIA. Golden sweepers wrap around the coral- and sponge-covered walls of Cannibal Rock like a slippery ribbon that refuses to stay put. Off Komodo National Park, 230 miles east of Bali, this luxuriously rich site features pygmy seahorses, sea apples, black frogfish and fire urchins harboring zebra crabs.



By day, Cannibal Rock may be sheathed in golden sweepers, but by night it crawls with exotic invertebrates such as Spanish dancer nudibranchs and bumblebee shrimp.



(GALAPAGOS ISLANDS)

Kicker Rock

REMARKABLE MOMENTS are commonplace at Kicker Rock, a twin-peaked volcanic seamount jutting straight out of the ocean just a stone's throw from San Cristobal, easternmost of the Galapagos Islands. The giant schools of endemic black-striped salema and other baitfish found here are one big reason for stunning events. The little fish attract big fish, and big fish attract divers. Frequent diners include scalloped hammerhead sharks, Galapagos sharks, silky sharks, whale sharks and white-tip reef sharks. Less threatening, but no less thrilling, are sea turtles, porpoises, giant mantas and humpback whales.



A school of black-striped salema forms a temporary arch around a diver.



Because the maximum depth here is just 45 feet, you'll have plenty of bottom time to explore the canyons of The Chimney.

(BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS)

The Chimney

AMONG THE ISLETS off Virgin Gorda known as The Dogs, an underwater trail leads through a lavish canyon and an archway splattered with delicate orange cup corals. Huge boulders create a decorated tunnel that leads to an open sunlit chamber known as The Chimney. Bring a dive light to shine on the spotted drums, jawfish, queen angels, brittle stars, banded coral shrimp and spotted rock lobster. When you're finished exploring, continue to the end of the canyon where white coral grows around a crack in the walls wide enough to exit through. **SD**

GET THERE > For more information on these Great Dives, turn to *In Depth*, page 104, section 1.

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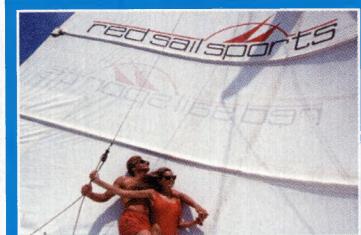
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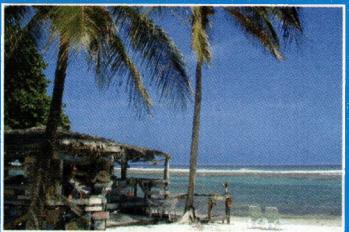


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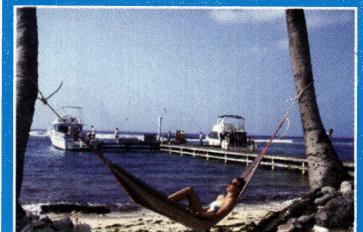
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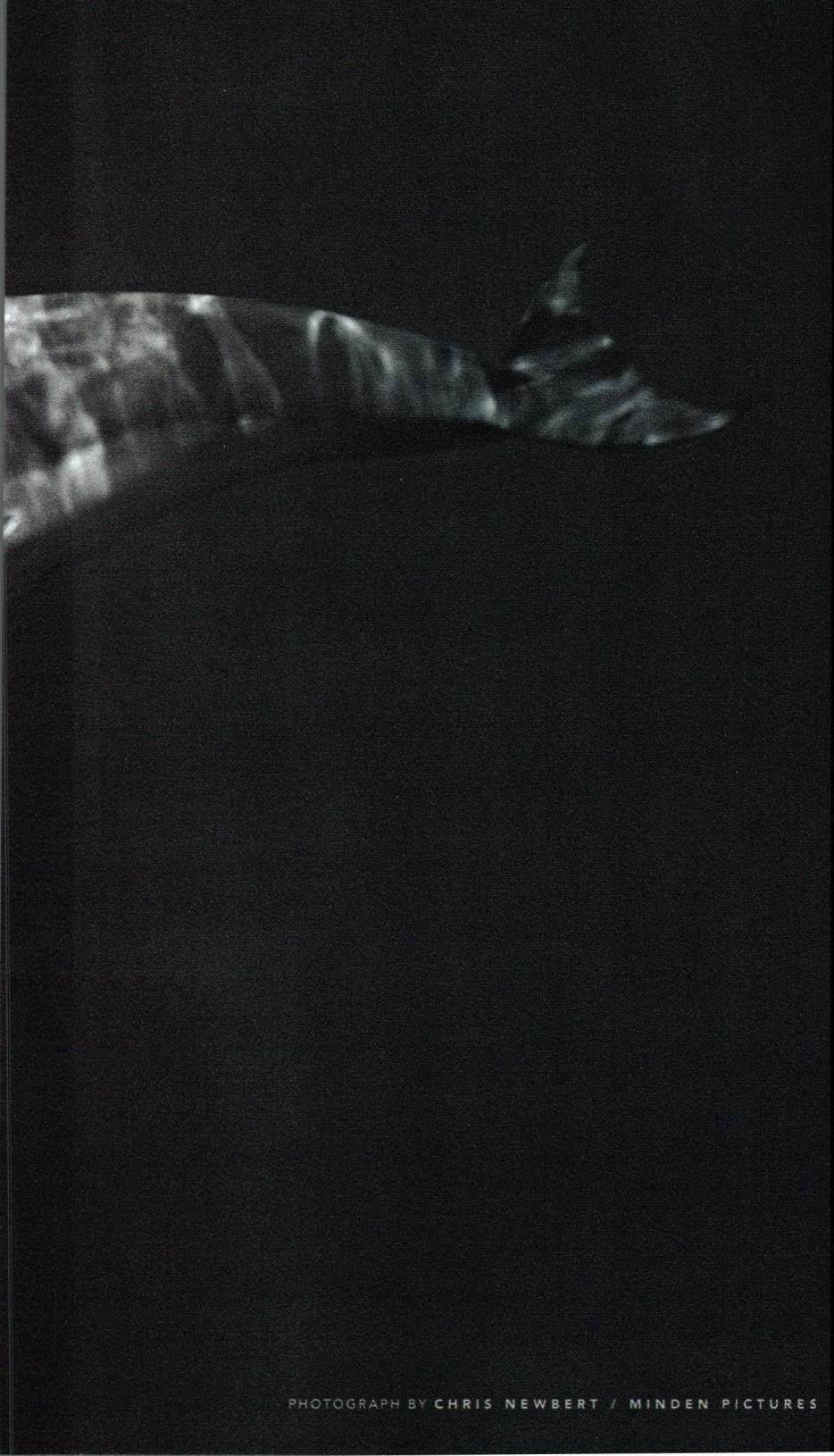
Currie



When 14 beaked whales died in the Canary Islands, scientists found tissue damage similar to that found in people with DCS. Navy sonar could be the culprit.



notes



(RESEARCH)

Can Whales Get Bent?

Navy sonar may be responsible for DCS-like symptoms.

When 14 beaked whales died near the site of an international naval exercise in the Atlantic's Canary Islands 20 months ago, scientists found a possible link between the whales' deaths and military sonar. Autopsies on 10 of the whales, which began coming ashore about four hours after the start of mid-frequency sonar activity, showed strange gas-bubble lesions in the animals' vital organs.

The tissue damage was similar to that caused by bubble formation seen in humans with decompression sickness (DCS). Deep-diving cetaceans accumulate large amounts of dissolved nitrogen during dives, but these mammals are thought to use physiological and behavioral adaptations to prevent the formation of gas bubbles.

But startled whales, disoriented by high-volume sonar, may surface too rapidly, causing a rush of gas bubbles through their tissues and DCS-like effects. Another theory is that sonar pressure waves on a whale's body could cause deadly nitrogen bubbles to form. Both explanations remain unproven, and it is not known at what distances the sonar may be harmful.

"Bubble formation in cetaceans as a result of sound exposure by any mechanism needs to be confirmed," says Paul Jepson of the Zoology Society of London, who led the team of international scientists that reported their findings on the beaked whales in the journal *Nature*. "If it is confirmed, then it is safe to say that we do not currently know what level of received sound will be enough to induce these effects."

Recent legislation has relaxed restrictions on the use of submarine tracking sonar and other activities that could affect marine mammals. —LANCE LEONHARDT

(TOPSIDE)

BONE YARD**Between dives, flats fishing offers ankle-deep adventure.**

Bonefish are tenacious fighters when hooked, leaping out of the water and resisting any attempt to land them. Fishing for them is strictly catch-and-release because, true to its name, this catch is too bony for eating. Guided excursions can be arranged through resorts at many dive destinations where bonefish converge on nearby sand flats, including southern Belize, the Bahamas, Honduras's Bay Islands, the Turks & Caicos, and Akumal, Mexico.



A pair of fishermen flycast for bonefish in the saltwater flats off southern Belize.

(QUOTE)

I wiggled my fingers in front of it,
and the thing just grabbed
ahold of my little finger.

It had a wicked crunch.
I took my glove off, and that's
when I saw my finger was gone.

—RANDY JORDAN, OWNER OF JUPITER DIVE
CENTER, ON LOSING HIS PINKIE FINGER TO A
PORCUPINEFISH WHILE DIVING OFF JUPITER, FLA.

(JUST IN)

The Moor the Merrier Thanks to the crew of the Peter Hughes live-aboard *Wind Dancer*, dive boats can now hook on to moorings at several sites off Tobago. *Wind Dancer* crewmembers worked 10 days placing moorings in Mount Irvine Bay (near the wreck of the *Maverick*), Castara Bay, Man O' War Bay (Charlotteville) and Kings Bay. "It's something we do everywhere we go," says Peter Hughes. "It's an ongoing process. We add and repair buoys as needed." The *Wind Dancer* crew has plans to place additional moorings for Sisters Rock, Batteaux Bay (Speyside) and the St. Giles Islands.

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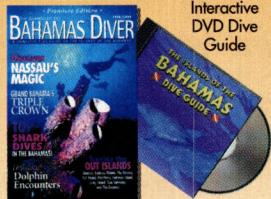
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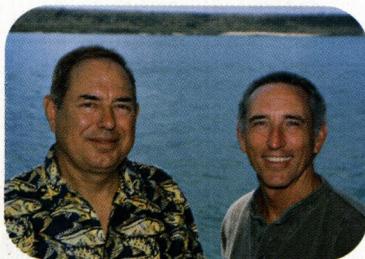


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(EDUCATION)

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When we can't identify a marine life species here at *Scuba Diving*, we turn to our dog-eared *Reef Identification* books, written by marine life ID experts Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach. Humann and DeLoach have made identifying marine species a piece of cake with their guides, but nothing beats their seminars and lectures for teaching the basics—and the joys—of marine life ID. Now you can do it while on vacation at any of three destinations known for the diversity of their fish populations. Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) offers three "Discovery" dive vacations led by Humann and DeLoach.

Paul Humann leads two of the trips: July 31 to Aug. 7, 2004, in Key Largo, Fla., and Nov. 6-13, 2004, in Nassau, Bahamas.

Ned DeLoach and Anna DeLoach will lead a fish behavior and coral spawning trip to Bonaire from Sept. 4-11, 2004, which coincides with the local mass coral spawn.

During the weeklong excursions, you'll study fish identification basics and survey methods, identification and behavior of marine invertebrates (shrimps, nudibranchs, sea stars, etc.), and environmental issues currently affecting coral reefs.

For details, call Dive Reservation Service at (888) 363-3345.

KEN MARKS

(REEF NEWS)

Buy a Tag, Save a Reef In Florida, specialty license plates trumpet motorists' support for more than 80 groups and causes—from the state's colleges and universities to manatees, dolphins and sea turtles to breast cancer research. Now state legislators have authorized a new "Protect Our Reefs" license plate.

By paying an extra \$25 for the tag, motorists fund research conducted on Florida's reefs. Best-selling author and *Outside* magazine contributor Randy Wayne White joined state and local officials in kicking off the Protect Our Reefs campaign. "I was certified in 1977, in Cuba, and I've dived on reefs all over the world. I've seen how reefs are dying," says White, a longtime Florida resident. "It's extremely important to do what we can to help save them."



(BUSINESS)

SCUBA CUM LAUDE

A diving degree can take your career to new depths.

A bachelor's degree in scuba may sound like a bad frat house joke, but at Miami's Barry University, it's a legitimate academic major. And if you enroll, says program facilitator Sharon Lee Kegeles, you'd better be prepared to hit the books as often as you hit the water.

"A lot of people come to the school thinking this is an easy program—but it's not," she says. The bachelor of science in sports management with a diving industry certification requires 140 semester hours of credit—more than most other degrees. As part of the curriculum, students earn NAUI or PADI instructor certification in addition to American

Red Cross lifeguard training and the DAN oxygen provider course. The program also requires students to earn a minor in business, take 25 credit hours of sports and exercise science, and complete a semester-long internship.

So what can you do with a degree in diving? Ask graduate Angel Rovira, who remembers being teased by his nondiving classmates, but nobody's laughing at him now. Rovira owns Parguera Divers, in Puerto Rico, where he leads more than 1,500 divers a year to the La Parguera wall. Rovira credits much of his success to what he learned at Barry. —MICHAEL JORDAN

For more information:
www.barry.edu/hpls/BS/diving/default.htm

(MARINE LIFE)

Free at Last

Keiko, the six-ton, 24-foot-long killer whale that starred in three *Free Willy* movies and captured the hearts of people around the world, died in Norwegian coastal waters on Dec. 12, 2003, after contracting acute pneumonia.

The project to return Keiko to the wild became widely publicized since it began in 1993. Captured as a two-year-old off Iceland in 1979, Keiko was eventually sold to a Mexico City amusement park. In 1992, Warner Bros. Studios moviemakers began filming *Free Willy*, starring Keiko, on location in Mexico City. The movie's success brought worldwide attention to the orca's plight. In 1995, the Free Willy Keiko Foundation was formed, and work began on a rehabilitation facility at the Oregon Coast Aquarium; Keiko was moved there in 1996. Two

years later, he was airlifted to Iceland, where his handlers prepared him for the wild.

"The project for Keiko was a success," says Mark Berman of the Free Willy Keiko Foundation. "He proved that these whales can be returned to some sort of freedom, and that it's better than living in a tank doing circus tricks."



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(CRIME)

Drinking Like a Fish

Three divers were turned into police after a news photo showed them plying a freshly caught pike with champagne at an outdoor New Year's Eve party near Opole, Poland.

One of the divers told a reporter that they had found the pike half-dead and wanted to "restore it to consciousness by treating it with champagne."

The ill-advised stunt could land the trio in jail, according to Poland's National Fishing Authority. There was no news on the fate of the souped pike, but we hope it gets its day in court.

(PROTECTION)

GROUNDER GROUPIES

The Cayman Islands and the Bahamas move to protect the big fish.

Citing a sharp decline in the local grouper population, the Cayman Islands banned fishing in the species' spawning areas for eight years. The decision by the islands' Marine Conservation Board closes fisheries in six spawning areas known as grouper holes.

Officials in the Bahamas imposed a much shorter ban, from December 2003 until February 2004, but planned another closure from December 2004 until February 2005.

Nassau grouper, a favorite Caribbean entrée, matures slowly, and requires years to replenish a population decimated by overfishing.

Most islanders "agree that tighter restrictions are necessary to prevent us from losing our grouper permanently, as has happened in other areas of the Caribbean," says Don Foster, chairman of the Cayman Marine Conservation Board.

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L I F E

(FISH ID)

WHAT'S THIS?

This finger-sized, Indo-Pacific beauty is known for the fluorescent markings around its eyes, dramatic, deep-orange red near the tail and its fitting movements. These two characteristics—a fiery coloring and skittish swimming—are clues to its name. Shy around divers, it quickly bolts to the safety of its small burrow with a flick of its elongated dorsal fin. You'll find this fish between 30 and 90 feet, hovering with its head up and tail down, but our colorful mystery fish can disappear with incendiary speed.

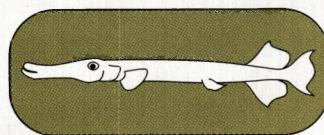
the ANSWER

FIRE DARTFISH OR RED FIRE GOBY, *Nemateleotris magnifica*

the D I F F E R E N C E

Get the skinny on two of the reef's lankiest fishes.

In the great orchestra of reef fishes, there are two species in the horn section: the trumpetfish, *Aulostomus maculatus*;



and the cornetfish, *Fistularia tabacaria*. The trumpetfish got its name not only for its long, thin body, but also from its ability to flare its terminal mouth, which resem-

bles the business end of a trumpet. The cornetfish, an even longer and thinner fish, can reach a length of more than six feet, compared to

three feet for the largest trumpetfish. A sure way to distinguish

between the two look-alikes is by noting the long tail filament extending from the rear of the cornetfish's tapered body—an obvious bit of piscine anatomy



absent from the trumpetfish.

Although these species are limited to tropical western Atlantic waters, both have similar-looking counterparts that

inhabit the vast Indo-Pacific. While the trumpetfish is, far and away, the more common of the pair in the Caribbean, cornetfish greatly outnumber

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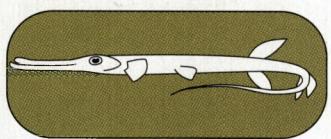
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trumpetfish in the Pacific, where they are frequently sighted hovering in sizeable schools over shallow sand flats and seagrass beds.

Trumpetfish are voracious predators that stalk small fishes throughout the day. Stealth is their game and persistence is their strength. Their elongated bodies scarcely cast a shadow as the solitary predators cautiously weave



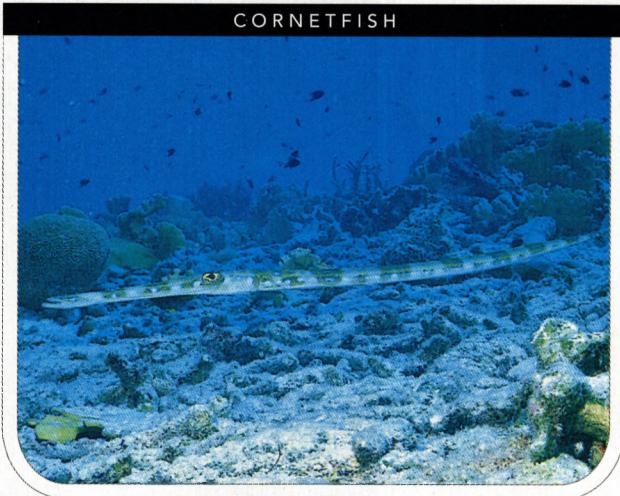
their way through a maze of bottom structures. To better conceal their positions, they often assume a vertical posture among the upright branches of

waving gorgonians or align their broomstick bodies with mooring ropes.

While on the move, trumpetfish typically swim horizontally just above the bottom, but quickly employ a vertical striking stance when prey is in sight. They often remain poised straight up, with their

mouths only inches from the bottom for extended periods, waiting for a holed-

up fish to reappear. Downward strikes, generated from bowed bodies, are lightning-fast. Prey generally measures less than two inches, although a five-inch



CORNETFISH

squirrfish was once found inside a two-foot specimen. Although known for their hunting prowess, a scientific study recorded only eight successful

trumpetfish strikes in 45 attempts during 19 hours of observed stalking. —PAUL HUMANN AND NED DELOACH

Bali

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DIVE GUIDE



Dive Cozumel Like a Veteran

All you need to know to be an instant expert. **BY KEITH PHILLIPS**

IT'S EASY TO SPOT the Cozumel veterans as I near the departure gate in Houston. I can tell from the dive-logo shirts, hats and the carry-on regulator bags that just about everybody on this direct hop to Mexico's largest

THE BEST RESORTS, DIVES & SPECIAL DEALS

Easy-drift currents and prolific reefs keep Cozumel veterans coming back for more, year after year.

Go to ScubaDiving.com and select Cozumel from the *TripFinder* menu to get advice on dive operators, hotels and restaurants from the divers who've been there. We have trip reports and photo galleries from veterans and newbies alike.

MORE COZUMEL

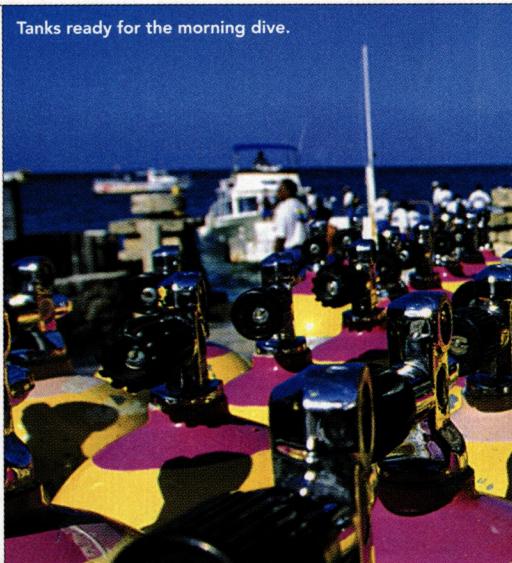
Caribbean island is a diver. But the Cozumel vets have an easy air about them. This two-hour flight is as familiar to them as their morning commute to the office. They stow their luggage with practiced ease, joke with the flight attendants and begin removing the top layer of clothes they won't need when the cabin door reopens to the warm Yucatan air. They tell old jokes and stories about the last trip, and when the captain comes on the intercom with the weather report from the island on this January morning—sunny and 72—one diver

can't help but exclaim, "Perfect!"

"Seventy-two on top means the water will be 80 degrees," another explains to his traveling companion, rubbing his hands together with obvious satisfaction. "It's going to be great!"

Cozumel veterans are divers who can't get enough of world-class drift diving, bargain resort packages and the festive atmosphere of this legendary island. They return year after year, often several times a year, forever in search of the ultimate experience. They trade dive shop recommendations and

Tanks ready for the morning dive.



resort critiques with an intensity others might reserve for hot stock tips. They're on a first-name, how's-the-family basis with the dive crew and they know exactly where on the backstreets of San Miguel to find the best hidden restaurants.

While nothing short of repeat visits to the island can make you a Cozumel vet, we can help you get started.

Let's start with the main reason to come here: effortless drift diving. A warm, two- to three-knot current sweeps the leeward west shore of the island, nourishing a healthy reef system that lines the drop-off of the 12-mile-wide Yucatan Channel. All you have to do is sit back and enjoy the ride on more than 40 recognized dive sites that fall into three distinct categories.

Vertical walls like **Maracaibo Deep** and **Santa Rosa Wall** range from 70 to 130-plus feet and offer heart-pounding blue-water excitement. Look for plate corals, monstrous sponges, deepwater gorgonians, and a variety of reef and pelagic fish species.

Coral pinnacles are some of the best-loved sites on the island, offering great dives for every skill level. Sites like **Palancar Horseshoe**, **Columbia Pinnacles** and **Punta Sur** range in depth from 30 to 130-plus feet. Instead of a vertical drop-off, these sites are formed by a picket line of towering coral plateaus that fuse together in a maze of tunnels, archways, canyons and swim-throughs.

(continued on page 40)

STEVE SIMONSEN (LEFT); CHRIS CRUMLEY (TOP CENTER)



10 FAVORITE COZUMEL DIVES

PHOTO BY ETHAN GORDON (TOP LEFT); SCUBA DIVER (TOP RIGHT); ANDREW D. MILLER (PAGES 34-35)

SANTA ROSA WALL

Depth: 60 to 130 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Intermediate. A jagged row of coral heads lines the wall's edge and is covered in deepwater gorgonians, sheet corals and a variety of sponges. To the northern end of the reef, there is a series of swim-throughs you can follow back to the shallows. When you're exploring the maze, expect to see grouper and coney hanging out on the reef while juvenile wrasses pick them clean of parasites.

CEDAR PASS

Depth: 35 to 60 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Novice to intermediate.

Look for moray eels hidden in the coral crevices of this popular coral ridge. It's a fast drift over ground-level encrusting sponges and diminutive coral heads that grow bigger as you head north. The largest coral heads are perforated with swim-through tunnels, and if you duck into the lee you're sure to find big schools of grunts and snapper.

PALANCAR HORSESHOE

Depth: 30 to 130-plus feet.

Skill Level: Intermediate.

Named for a U-shaped protrusion on the wall, this site features a maze of tunnels and swim-throughs through tall heads of brain, star and sheet corals. Tunnels lead to arches and grottoes with sunny skylights looking toward the surface and blue windows looking out to the channel. Expect schools of blue and brown chromis and bar jacks. Inside the tunnels, you'll pass alcoves filled with glassy sweepers.

PUNTA SUR

Depth: 80 to 130 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Intermediate to advanced. This site is home to the Devil's Throat, a near-vertical coral passageway that swallows divers at 80 feet and spits them out again in the channel at 120 feet. Watch for eagle rays and turtles cruising the deep.

MARACAIBO DEEP

Depth: 60 to 130 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Advanced to expert.

Lots of deep blue water and the possibility of reversing current on the island's southernmost reef make it best suited to advanced divers. The wall starts

at 90 feet and is covered with black corals, orange elephant ear sponges and broad sheet corals, but the real thrill is the chance to see sharks, rays and loggerhead sea turtles out in open water.

MARACAIBO SHALLOWS

Depth: 70 to 90 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Intermediate to advanced. This site features a lush, rolling field of near-virgin reef that few divers ever visit. Tropicals swarm over a field of gorgonians that sway in the unpredictable and sometimes changing currents.

DALILA

Depth: 45 feet. **Skill Level:**

Novice. Washed by a gentle current, this low-profile patch reef features lots of angelfish and colorful sponges. It's also a splendid place to find the splendid toadfish, so bring a light and peer beneath crevices and inside holes.

TORMENTOS REEF

Depth: 50 to 70 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Intermediate. The strong south-to-north current at Tor-

mentos makes this site the fastest drift diving on the island. You'll soar over large coral heads topped with whip corals and sea fans. Need a break from the water ride? Drop into the lee to surprise the schools of grunts and creole wrasse. Look for lobster in the crevices of the coral heads, too.

SANTA ROSA SHALLOWS

Depth: 40 to 60 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Intermediate to advanced. Want drama? Need excitement? Try drifting alongside the spectacular coral cliffs where the current has carved out caves, grottoes and tunnels.

BARRACUDA REEF

Depth: 70 to 110 feet. **Skill:**

Level: Advanced. Don't expect to be taken to this site unless you've demonstrated excellent air consumption and the skills to handle a deep current dive. The wall is a beautiful example of deep coral formations—vast plate corals, orange elephant ear sponges and deepwater gorgonians, but the real reason to dive here is the chance to see sharks, manta rays and sea turtles.



Shallow coral gardens offer extended bottom times and lots of marine life, like this school of porkfish.

(continued from page 38)

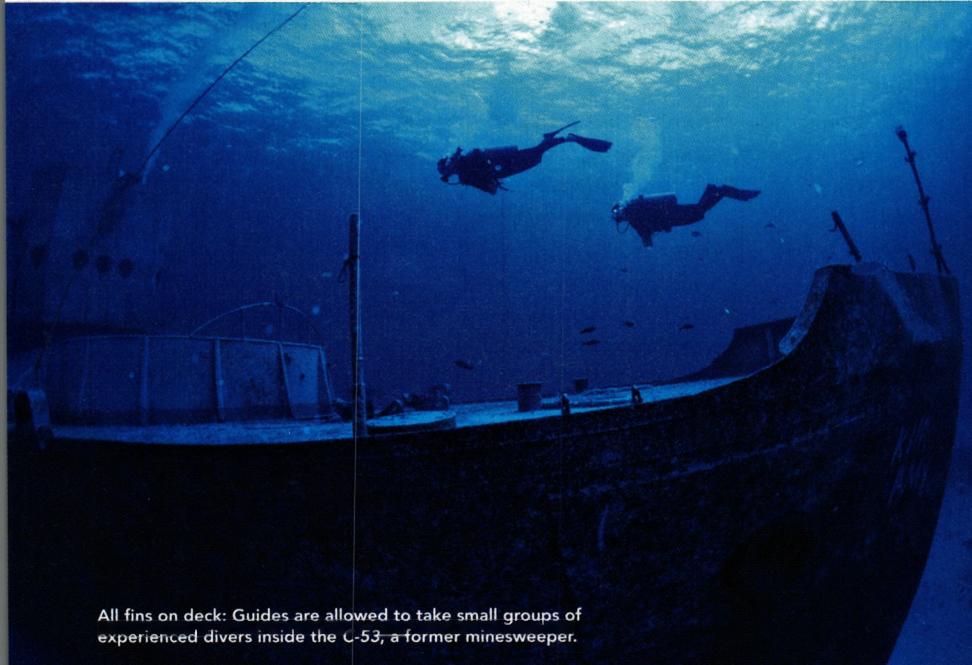
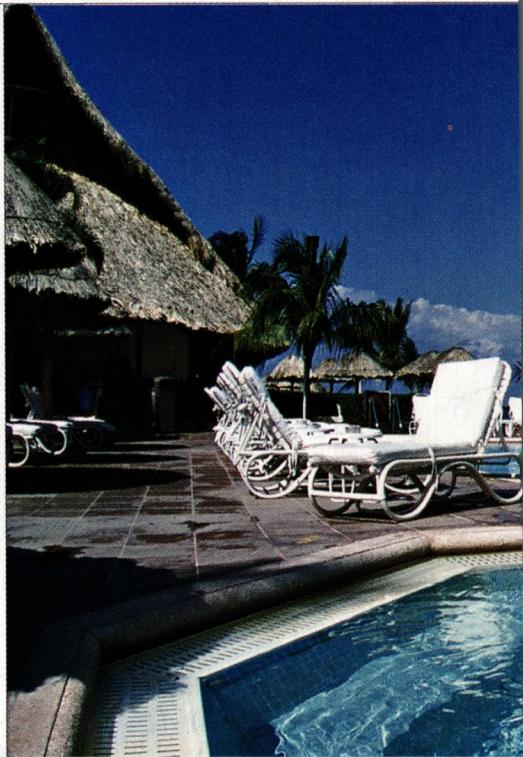
The nearshore coral gardens like Cedar Pass and Santa Rosa Shallows may not be the island's top attractions, but they are loaded with tropical fish and they are the only place in the world where you will find the splendid toadfish, a species found only in Cozumel. With depths ranging from 20 to 50 feet, they are excellent second dives.

A recent addition to the natural reefs is the *C-53*, or *Felipe Xicotencatl*, a former Mexican Navy minesweeper. Prepared as an artificial reef, the 184-foot vessel sits upright and intact on a white-sand bottom near Chankanaab Bay. The wreck has been opened so that experienced divers can explore the interior by following their guide and permanent lines through everything from the engine room to the officers' quar-

Get the Drift

IT'S THE CURRENT that makes Cozumel drift diving so addictive. But to truly enjoy this free ride, you'll need to find that sweet spot of neutral buoyancy. It's also important for safety—on deep wall dives where there is no hard bottom to stop your descent, you don't want to be kicking or leaning on the power inflator just to stay neutral. And at the end of every dive, you'll need to make a drifting safety stop without the assistance of an anchor line.

A lot of divers begin their week in Cozumel seriously overweighted. At the coldest, water temperatures hit 75 degrees, so you can go easy on the neoprene and therefore the weight. Don't be afraid to ask your divemaster for help in fine-tuning your buoy-



All fins on deck: Guides are allowed to take small groups of experienced divers inside the *C-53*, a former minesweeper.

ters. Inside the wreck you'll find schools of glassy sweepers and a few oversized grouper. Under the rules of the Cozumel marine park, guides are allowed to take no more than four divers into the wreck at a time, so you may need to sign up for this dive early in your stay.

ancy. They routinely help first-timers strip pounds off their belts.

Drift diving also requires you to follow certain rules for safety. For example, you have to follow the dive guide and stay with your group. To maintain control, your guide will set maximum depth and time limits. Because

the dive boat follows the group's bubble trail and the guide's surface marker, you need to stay within visual range of your divemaster, but there's no reason to bunch up on his fins. With consistent 100-foot visibility, you can space out and stay in visual contact.

Dive Drills

TWICE A DAY, an armada of dive boats large and small, old and new, literally race south to the reefs on two-tank excursions. Most operators follow a predictable pattern. Morning trips start with a wall dive to a max depth of 80 to 90 feet for 30 minutes—or until the first diver reaches 700 psi. After a one-hour surface interval, divers explore the edge of the drop-off. Afternoon trips dive the edge of the wall and shallow nearshore reefs.

The better shops usually try to group divers on different boats according to skill level (i.e., the beginner's boat, the advanced boat, the computer boat, etc.). Trips to advanced sites like **Punta Sur, Maracaibo Deep** and **Barracuda** are usually done only on request. If you feel up to diving an advanced site, ask early in your stay to give the operator time to check out your skills and find enough divers to make the trip.

BRADLEY IRELAND (LEFT & TOP); ETHAN GORDON (RIGHT)



Surface Intervals

EVEN IN THE TIME OF the ancient Mayans, who populated the entire Yucatan region from 300 to 900 A.D., Cozumel's main industry was tourism. Back then, the attraction was religion, not reefs. Mayan women made pilgrimages to the island to worship Ix Chel, the goddess of fertility. Ruins from the era are found all across the island, but the best have been excavated and reconstruct-

ed at San Gervasio. Topside, Cozumel offers:

► **BEACH CLUBS.** Rent a car and drive to the island's windward eastern shore where you can chill out with volleyball, *cerveza* and an afternoon siesta on the beach. Along the way, you can enjoy an awe-inspiring view of the island from the lighthouse at Punta Celaain on the island's southern tip.

► **DOWNTOWN SAN MIGUEL.** You can find it all on the funky backstreets of the island's only town. The Museum of Cozumel is a quiet, cool place to spend a hot afternoon. While you're in town you can shop for jewelry, perfume and liquor, and visit more trinket shops than you can count.

A visit to Carlos 'n Charlie's bar, now located in the Punta Langosta,

is a Cozumel rite of passage. Yard-drinking contests, upside-down shooters and rock 'n' roll cranked up to 11. Party on—as long as you're not diving the next day.

There are any number of great restaurants to choose from. For fine dining in a casual atmosphere, try La Prima. For the best "local flavor," try La Choza. Any cab can get you there, or look for the tall thatch roof.

And whatever you do, don't miss Sunday evenings in the town square. There's a fiesta every weekend with live music, dancing, food vendors and artists at work.

SD

GET THERE > For more information on Cozumel, turn to *In Depth*, page 104, section 2.



BE AN INSTANT EXPERT

FIRST-TIMERS AND COZUMEL VETS alike will benefit from flipping through the pages of the new *Cozumel Dive Guide and Log Book*. Published by Underwater Editions and compiled with the help of divemasters from across the island, the book offers accurate descriptions of popular sites. More importantly, its foldout color maps of the dives show you, at a glance, the reef structure and the route most dive guides follow. The book is available at most Cozumel dive shops for \$26 or online at www.underwatereditions.com.

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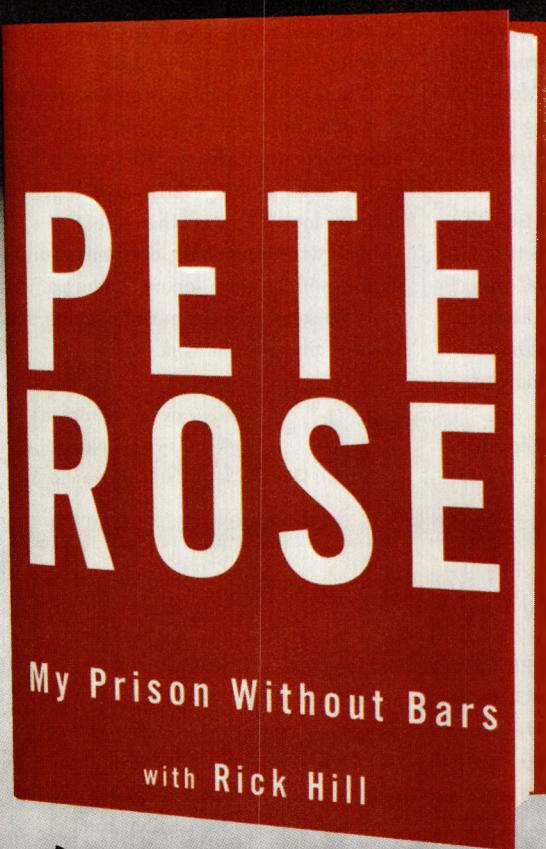
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You don't have to go deep to dive into history. The 1883 wreck of the three-masted schooner *Wells Burt* lies in 45 feet of water off Chicago.



10 Great Wrecks of the Great Lakes

The diving on these wrecks is nearly as legendary as the ships themselves.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRIS KOHL

THERE'S a story behind every ship that lies at the bottom of the five Great Lakes. These immense bodies of water—Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan and Superior—are spread across an area 690 miles long and 860 miles wide, and have claimed an estimated 6,000 vessels. Though the locations of three-quarters of these wrecks are unknown, many of them are no farther than a drive to a dock and a short boat ride away. Protected by law and frigid water, they are ice-water museums, the stuff of seafaring lore and some of the best-preserved wrecks in the world. Here are 10 Great Lakes wrecks that are ideal for recreational divers.

LAKE ONTARIO *Annie Falconer*

THE TWO-MASTED schooner *Annie Falconer* created quite a bit of excitement after its discovery in 1975 because it is upright, intact and in relatively shallow water, 78 feet. Built in 1867, *Annie Falconer* was a classic Great Lakes schooner. Carrying a cargo of soft coal, the 108-foot-long vessel foundered in a violent storm just off Point Traverse in November 1904.

Sitting on a hard sand and mud bottom and rising about 11 feet to a deck-level depth of 67 feet, the wreck features deadeyes, anchors, blocks, chains and the ship's wheel still upright and in place. The stern portion, which probably

broke off as the ship sank, is nearby, at an angle to the main hull. The coal cargo lies in open view at the ship's split, with broken dishes and numerous artifacts scattered on top. Limited penetration is possible in the forward hull for divers who are properly trained.

LAKE ONTARIO *Wolfe Islander II*

IN THE MID-1970s, I drove my old station wagon onto the *Wolfe Islander II* ferry and crossed the St. Lawrence River from Kingston, Ontario, to Wolfe Island, unaware then that someday I would be diving on this ship.

Built in 1946, the *Wolfe Islander II* served the eastern Lake Ontario region for over three decades. In 1985, after lying idle for several years, the 144-foot-long ferry became the first commercial ship scuttled in the Great Lakes for the express purpose of creating a dive site.

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DRIVE & DIVE



Sitting upright three miles east of the city of Kingston in an all-weather stretch of water, the superstructure can be explored in 40 feet of water, while the impressive three-bladed propeller, still in place, can be found on the bottom at 85 feet. Divers can glide across the vessel's open deck area, complete with davits, bitts, dorades (large conical air vents), smokestack and railings galore. Divers trained in wreck penetration can explore the interior, including the engine room. All doors and hatches were removed before the ship was scuttled.

LAKE ERIE Dean Richmond

THE WOODEN steamer *Dean Richmond* enjoyed fame early in its career: It was the largest package freighter on the Great Lakes at the time of its launch in 1864. It was the *Dean Richmond*'s dramatic demise



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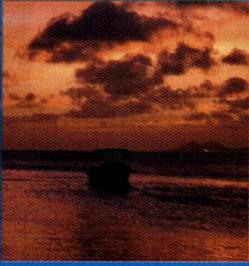
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and the subsequent long quest for its valuable cargo of zinc, however, that made the ship the stuff of legends. Disappearing with all 18 people on board in a violent autumn storm in eastern Lake Erie on Oct. 14, 1893, the location of the *Dean Richmond* remained unknown for 90 years.

The vessel lies upside down in 100 to 120 feet of water. One of the ship's impressive twin propellers is still in place, and is often the starting point for exploring the entire wreck. A portion of the expansive wooden hull, dynamited and damaged by commercial interests eager to reach the ship's cargo of zinc ingots, provides access to the engine room and other below-deck regions for divers trained in penetration diving.

LAKE ERIE Merida

LIKE THE *Dean Richmond*, the 360-foot-long, steel steamer *Merida* was the largest vessel of its type on the Great Lakes when the ship was launched in 1893. The ship sank with all hands during the severe Black Friday storm of Oct. 20, 1916. Three other commercial ships went to the bottom of Lake Erie during that furious upheaval, but the *Merida* was the first to be located, explored by divers and identified.

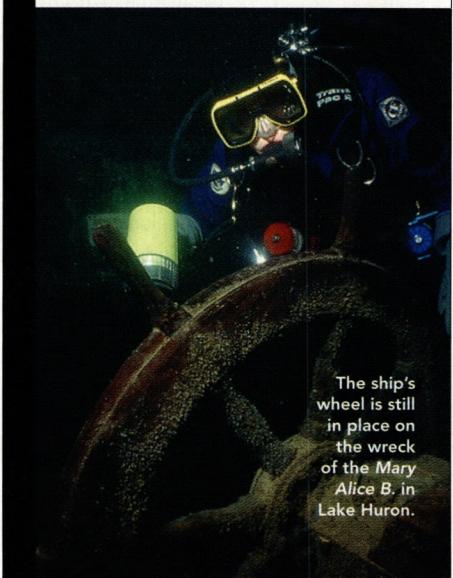
Always one of my favorite Lake Erie wrecks, *Merida* amazes me on every visit. Lying northeast of Cleveland, Ohio, in 83 feet of water and sometimes rising 18 feet off the soft mud bottom, the *Merida* sits upright and mostly intact. The ship's backbone probably snapped from the massive weight of its iron ore cargo, so its ends rise on tortured angles from the level lake bottom. The sharp-angled bow is

adorned with a huge hinged fluke anchor lying flat on the deck at the peak, as well as a capstan, a second anchor and chain still in place, stanchions, railing and many artifacts. A few brass portholes can be found at the lower levels of the bow. The mid-ship area consists of numerous cargo hatches, but because this part of the ship is deeply embedded in the lake bottom, they're often totally covered by mud and silt. Occasionally, a storm will scour out the lake bottom beneath the wreck's propeller, making it possible to swim underneath the wreck. Though the stern's engine room is penetrable, it is very silty, making proper training and experience absolutely necessary for exploration there.

LAKE HURON

Mary Alice B.

THE WATERS OF Lake Huron rushed over this 44-year-old tugboat after it became waterlogged while under tow in the late summer of 1975. No lives were lost, but this small, 62-foot-long wreck wasn't located by divers until 1992. The *Mary Alice B.* was sitting upright in 98 feet of water and so intact that



The ship's wheel is still in place on the wreck of the *Mary Alice B.* in Lake Huron.

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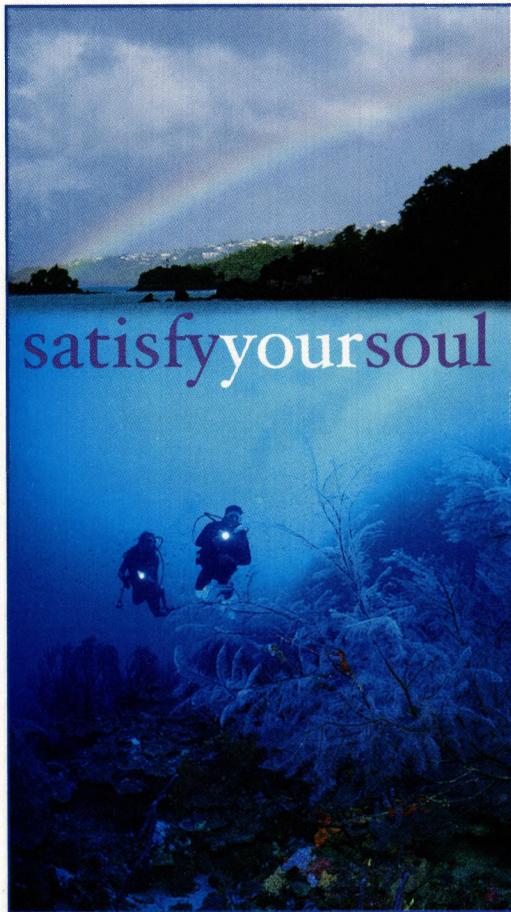
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dishes were still stacked in the galley (and still are). A popular wreck, it remains incredibly complete, right down to all the details of the engine room, the ship's name and port of call legible on the hull, the pilot-house with the horns and searchlight on its roof and, most memorably, the ship's wheel still in place.

LAKE MICHIGAN

Sandusky

BUILT IN THIS brig's namesake town, Sandusky, Ohio, in 1848, this wooden ship was lost with all seven hands and a cargo of grain in an 1856 storm in the Straits of Mackinac. *Sandusky* offers positive proof of the Great Lakes' preserving powers. Resting upright in 84 feet of water, the 110-foot-long brig sports a centerboard winch, a bilge pump, numerous deadeyes along its rails, both wooden-stocked bow anchors and a windlass still in place. A completely intact bowsprit, with chains still taut, frames a replica of a unique scroll figurehead resembling a ram's head that was replaced in 1989 after the original was damaged during an attempt to steal it.

LAKE MICHIGAN

Wells Burt

IT WOULD SEEM likely that any wreck lying in only 38 to 45 feet of water just off Chicago, the largest, busiest port on the Great Lakes, couldn't offer much to look at because it would be badly broken up or have had many of its artifacts stolen. But the enormous, three-masted schooner *Wells Burt*, built in 1873 and lost with all hands while riding out a severe storm in 1883, is one of the best examples of the excellent shipwreck diving that is found off the Windy City.

The vessel lies upright, firmly embedded in the clay bottom, with a slight port list. The ship's holds are open and easily accessible. A capstan and a large, impressive windlass stand on deck, while the steering post remains upright at the stern. After several of the vessel's oversized deadeyes were stolen, chains were placed through the "eyes" of the remaining ones.

LAKE MICHIGAN

Prins Willem V

THE OCEANGOING freighter *Prins Willem V*, built in the Netherlands in 1948, was headed back to the old country with a cargo of typically American products (automotive parts, animal hides, jukeboxes) in 1954 when, just three miles out of the Milwaukee harbor, it sank after a freak collision with a tug being towed.

Lying on its side in 90 feet of water and rising to within 48 feet of the surface, the 250-foot-long "Willy" is a multilevel wreck offering unforgettable sights along the deck and hull, including a pair of photogenic masts and several mast winches, a bow winch, the bridge house, radio room, captain's quarters and engine room skylights.

LAKE MICHIGAN

Frank O'Connor

THE WOODEN steamer *Frank O'Connor* caught fire off Cana Island, Wis., in 1919. Before abandoning ship in a lifeboat, the crew hastily opened their ship's seacocks to ensure a faster sinking—hoping that their vessel and its cargo of coal could eventually be salvaged and returned to use.

At its deepest, the wreck rests in 67 feet of water, and sports an impressive 20-foot-tall triple expan-



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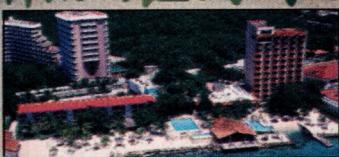


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sion steam engine, two large scotch boilers, a steam windlass, a capstan, bow chain, rudder and steering quadrant both lying flat, and a huge, four-bladed propeller. This wreck is popular among divers off Wisconsin's historic Door County peninsula.



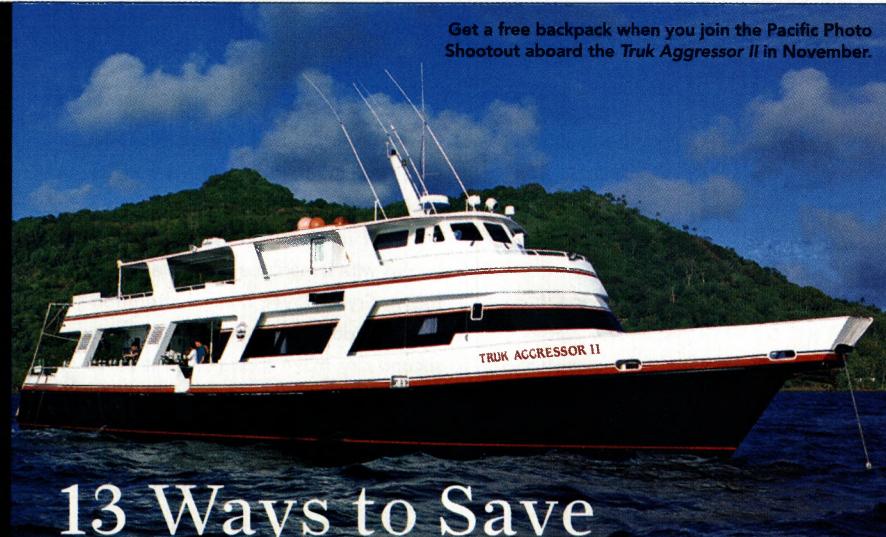
The schooner *Bermuda* lies in its second resting place in 30 feet of water.

LAKE SUPERIOR Bermuda

UPRIGHT, INTACT, easily penetrable and eminently explorable in 12 to 30 feet of water, this vintage 1860 schooner is one of the most popular wrecks in all of the Great Lakes.

Bermuda foundered during a storm in Munising Bay's deeper water in 1870 with the loss of three lives, but was raised in 1883, along with its heavy iron ore cargo, and towed into the shallow, protected waters of Grand Island's Murray Bay. There, the towing chains accidentally slipped before the ship reached its destination. Most of the iron ore was recovered in place, but *Bermuda* never sailed again. The shallow depth allows divers lots of bottom time to savor its features, including bow samson post, three hatches, extensive wooden railing and a distinctive rudder post. **SD**

GET THERE > For more information on these Great Lakes wrecks, turn to In Depth, page 105, section 3.



Get a free backpack when you join the Pacific Photo Shootout aboard the *Truk Aggressor II* in November.

13 Ways to Save

Dive more, pay less, with these packages featuring destinations from Belize to Bali.

PALAU OR TRUK LAGOON, MICRONESIA

Picture This

1 THE DEAL: Two seven-day Pacific Photo Shootout workshops are offered by the Aggressor Fleet. Photographer Mauricio Handler will offer instruction in over-under or split photography, extreme macro and mixed lighting, using a housed camera. The first trip is on the *Palau Aggressor II*, Nov. 14-21, 2004, and the second trip is aboard the *Truk Aggressor II*, Nov. 21-28, 2004. Price for each trip is \$2,945 p.p., dbl. occ., and includes five-and-a-half days' diving, night dives, airport transfers, meals and beverages, local beer and wine, and a chance to win gear from Aquatica, Light & Motion, XS Scuba, Technical Lighting Control and Ikelite. Mention *Scuba Diving* for a free Dive 44 backpack. Book both trips back-to-back and save \$200. (800-348-2628, www.aggressor.com)

PUERTO RICO

Free Hotskin

2 THE DEAL: The first 20 people to reserve a spot on the Puerto Rico Photo Expedition receive a free Henderson Hotskin. Plus, underwater shooters get free Fuji Provia 100 film. From May 8-15, 2004, you'll enjoy seven nights' accommodations

at the Copamarina Resort and accompany photographers Georgienne Bradley and Jay Ireland to a variety of settings, both under water and topside. Included are five days of two-tank dives, mangrove tour and snorkel, and hikes in the Guanica Dry Forest. Plus, you could win expedition prizes like Princeton Tec lights (Shockwave II, Tec-400 and Tec-40), SeaLife ReefMaster cameras and more. Price is \$829 p.p., dbl. occ., transfers not included. An all-inclusive rate of \$1,448 p.p., dbl. occ., is also available, which includes three meals daily and unlimited juices, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages. (800-301-1467)

COZUMEL, MEXICO

Iberostar for \$999

3 THE DEAL: Stay seven nights at the all-inclusive Iberostar Cozumel

hotel during its spring and summer special April 12 to June 30, 2004. For \$999 p.p., dbl. occ., taxes included, you'll also get five days of two-tank boat dives with Dressel Divers, plus all meals, snacks and unlimited bar. Discount airfare available. (866-423-7678, dive@iberostar-hotels.com)

CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA

Explore the Great Barrier Reef

4 THE DEAL: Explorer Ventures offers a discount through May 31, 2004, on three trips aboard the *Nimrod Explorer* live-aboard. Prices range from US\$1,095 to US\$1,645 p.p., dbl. occ., with 12 to 23 dives, depending on the length of the trip. Prices include the use of full gear with computer, flight transfers, meals and snacks, alcoholic beverages, and 10 percent Australian goods and services tax. (www.explorerventures.com)

KAUAI, HAWAII

Get More For Less

5 THE DEAL: The price drops each day for six days, from \$125 to \$93.50 p.p., including BC and regulator rental, with this multiday discount from Seasport Divers. As a bonus, you get free processing for one roll of film. Valid through May 31, 2004. (800-685-5889, www.seasport-divers.com)

BONAIRE DIVE FESTIVAL

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL Bonaire Dive Festival is scheduled for two weeks this year, June 5-19, 2004. There'll be diving for all levels of experience and island-wide events, including diving, contests, demos and lots more. For individual resort package information, visit the Dive Festival web site, www.bonairedive-festival.com. Dive deals include Captain Don's Habitat, from \$583 p.p., quad. occ., www.habitatdiverescorts.com or www.maduro.com; Plaza Resort Bonaire, from \$608 p.p., quad. occ., www.plazaresortbonaire.com; Sand Dollar Condominium Resort, from \$593 p.p., quad. occ., www.sanddollarbonaire.com; and Buddy Dive Resort, from \$589 p.p., six-person minimum, www.buddydive.com.



DIVE DEALS

COZUMEL, MEXICO

Four Free Dives

6 THE DEAL: Plaza las Glorias offers a seven-night stay, five days of two-tank morning dives with Dive Paradise, and four free single-tank afternoon dives for \$649 p.p., dbl. occ., taxes included. Add all meals and unlimited bar for \$199.

Rates are valid from April 16 to June 10, 2004. (888-599-3483, www.bayadventures.com)

CRYSTAL RIVER, FLA.

Swim with Manatees

7 THE DEAL: Crystal River Water-sports offers a two-day manatee and

Florida spring tour for a discounted \$400 p.p., two-person minimum. Mention Scuba Diving and get free use of a camera and film. The first day's itinerary begins with a manatee snorkel and dive tour in Crystal River, then an afternoon drift dive down Rainbow River. On the second day, make spring dives at Blue Grotto and Devil's Den springs. Special includes entrance fees, boat fees, gear rentals and dive guide. Available from April 1 to Sept. 30, 2004. (877-463-4846, www.floridamanateetours.com)

SOUTH CAICOS, TURKS & CAICOS

Expanding Business

8 THE DEAL: Salt Cay Divers has opened a dive operation on South Caicos, and is offering a grand opening special. Stay eight days and seven nights in the South Caicos Lodge or the Tradewinds Guest Suites for \$650 p.p., dbl. occ., plus five days of two-tank dives, one night dive and airport transfers. Valid until May 31, 2004. (649-946-6906, www.saltcaydivers.tc)

CAYMAN BRAC

A Family Affair

9 THE DEAL: Family Week on Cayman Brac includes day trips to Little Cayman, cruises around Cayman Brac, snorkeling, bird-watching, hiking and more. Supplied Air Snorkeling for Youth (SASY) and Bubblemaker programs are available. Prices are \$859 p.p., dbl. occ., for adults and \$359 p.p. for children under 12, including airfare from Miami, seven nights' accommodations at the Brac Caribbean Beach Village or Carib Sands Beach Resort, a Family Week pass, hotel transfers and hotel taxes. Dates: July 11-18, 2004. (866-THE-BRAC, www.naturecayman.com)

BALI, INDONESIA

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10 THE DEAL: Dive off Bali, the Gili Islands and Lombok on the

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TAVEUNI, FIJI

Digital Shootout

11 **THE DEAL:** The third underwater Digital Shootout in Fiji is May 6-15, 2004. For \$2,399 p.p., dbl. occ., taxes included, you get round-trip airfare from Los Angeles, seven nights' accommodations at the Garden Island Resort, five days of two-tank dives, all meals, transfers, Fijian meke (cultural dinner), all seminars and use of digital demo gear. Seminars and hands-on workshops include Adobe Photoshop image control and Adobe Premiere video editing, and one-on-one digital and video assistance. (888-390-9675, www.theshootout.org)

BELIZE

Belize by Live-aboard

12 **THE DEAL:** Peter Hughes offers a low-rate discount on seven nights aboard the *Sun Dancer II* from June 26 to Dec. 25, 2004, in a master stateroom for \$1,695, deluxe stateroom for \$1,595, or owner's suite for \$1,495, all p.p., dbl. occ. There is a \$65 port charge and \$15 recompression chamber support fee. Package includes all meals and beverages (including alcohol), airport transfers in Belize City, five-and-a-half days' diving and up to five dives per day. (www.peterhughes.com)

EXUMA CAYS, BAHAMAS

Fish Roundup

13 **THE DEAL:** The New England Aquarium in Boston hosts a unique

trip from April 24 to May 4, 2004, on the *R/V Coral Reef II* live-aboard to collect fish and marine life for tropical exhibits at the aquarium. The 11-day trip includes about nine days diving off the Exumas Cays, Conception Island, Rum Cay and the Crooked Islands, round-trip airfare from Boston, transfers, all meals, and a rare opportunity

to dive in the Aquarium's Giant Ocean Tank. The trip also includes a visit to the Atlantis Aquarium on Paradise Island. The last day will be spent in Miami preparing fish for shipment to the aquarium. Price is \$3,850 for members and \$3,895 for non-members. Must be 18 or older. (617-973-5248, hbourbon@neaq.org)

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Scuba Diving readers rated dozens of dive destinations to name the best places in the world for walk-in diving.

(SCORE: 9.8)

1 Bonaire

THE YELLOW-PAINTED STONES

lining Bonaire's coastal road speak to shore divers in the same way the neon lights of the Las Vegas strip speak to gam-



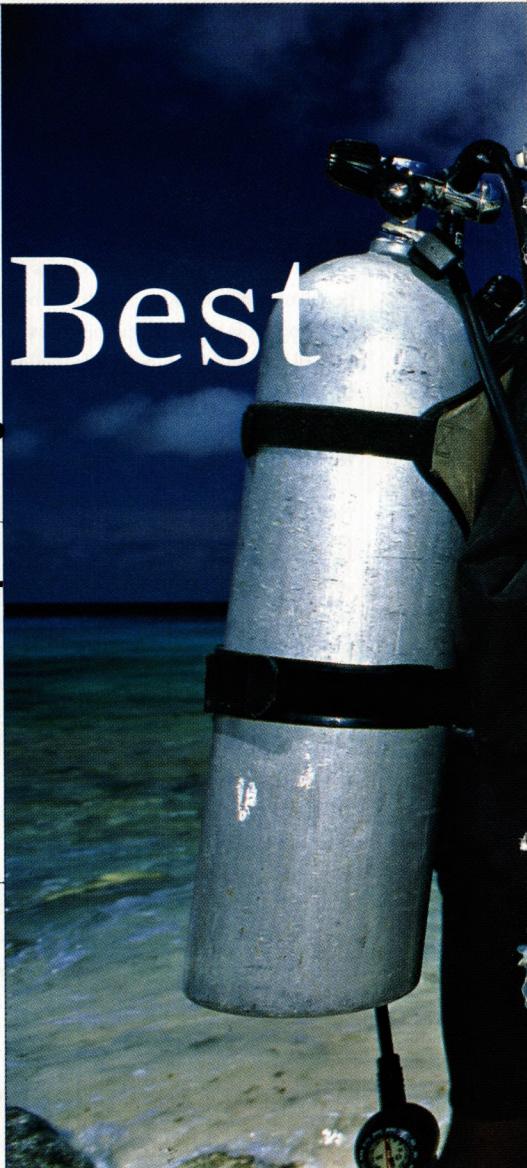
Easy entry: The beach at St. Croix's Cane Bay.

blers—with the promise of riches. Credit the island's geography and its pioneering marine park. The geography creates the perfect combination of conditions for some of the most stress-free diving in the world, and the marine park makes it equally stress-free for the world-famous reefs. The stones along the island's concave western shore mark the entry points for 60 shore-accessible sites, and each one offers a different look at Bonaire's marine environment. A list of the island's standout sites includes many of the world's best shore dives: **Salt Pier**, **Karpata**, **1,000 Steps**, **Invisibles**, **Rappel**, **La Dania's Leap**, the wreck of the *Hilma Hooker* and more.

(SCORE: 84.6)

2 U.S. Virgin Islands

DIVERS LOOKING FOR some boat-free action in "America's Caribbean" head for St. Croix, the largest of the U.S.



Virgin Islands. The most popular shore dive on the island is **Cane Bay Drop-Off**, which is accessed from the picturesque and uncrowded beach at Cane Bay. Swim out 100 yards or so over the shallow inner reef to find spur-and-groove formations at 40 feet, leading to the wall, which drops well beyond recreational limits. After the dive, dry off and walk across the street to have lunch at Boz's Beach Bar. Now, with a full stomach, you can head west a mile from Cane Bay to find the entry for **Northstar Wall**, another great shore dive. This site features a number of abandoned anchors, a cavern filled with

STEVE SIMONSEN (LEFT); CHRIS JAFFE (TOP)



It doesn't get any better than this: Bonaire's combination of ideal conditions and close reefs make it the top shore-diving destination in the world.

silversides at 60 feet and frequent visits from turtles. On the west side of St. Croix, the pilings of **Frederiksted Pier** are blanketed with sponges and corals and inhabited by macro species, including arrow crabs, brittle stars, coral shrimp and featherduster worms.

(SCORE: 81.8)

3 British Columbia
THE SHORE DIVING available from Vancouver Island and along the convoluted western coast of this Canadian province is as breathtaking and varied as

the topside scenery. Not far from the city of Vancouver, you can find hot spots like **Porteau Cove**, a provincial park catering to shore divers. Look for lingcod and metridium anemones on the reefs, as well as a number of wrecks, including the wooden-hulled minesweeper **Nakaya**. Farther north you'll find the Sunshine Coast, and sites like **Mermaid Cove**, where you can search for octopuses around this site's namesake mermaid statue. Over on Vancouver Island, you can brave the occasionally strong currents of **Ten Mile Point** to look for wolf eels and marvel at the site's anemone-carpeted wall.

(SCORE: 80.4)

4 Big Island, Hawaii
SOME OF THE BEST diving in Hawaii can be reached by shore along the Kona Coast of the Big Island. At **Place of Refuge**, a lava shelf provides an easy spot to suit up before you explore a site that offers everything from turtles to manta rays to lava caves and arches to whitetip sharks and spinner dolphins. **Kealakekua Bay Historical Park** marks the spot where Captain James Cook died in 1779 and provides a great jumping-off point for kayakers and divers to explore

READER RATINGS

the bay's waters. Swim through thick schools of yellow tangs in the shallows to reach the steep slope at the north side of the bay. At **Puako**, 30 miles north of Kailua-Kona, you can swim down a lava tube to exit on the ocean side of the lava shelf, where green sea turtles may be waiting to greet you.

(SCORE: 80)

5 Washington State
SEATTLE IS KNOWN for good coffee and bad weather, but according to our readers, it should be equally renowned for its proximity to some of the world's best shore diving. **Seacrest Park** is a popular weekend spot for open-water checkout dives, but experienced divers love it because it's a great place to find giant Pacific octopuses and

rare six-gill sharks. Other shore dive sites line Puget Sound from **Kayak Point County Park** in the north to **Sunny Side Park**, south of Tacoma.

(SCORE: 78.6)

6 Curaçao

LIKE ITS SISTER ISLAND, Bonaire, Curaçao has marked its numerous shore dives with stones, making it a snap to find great diving from the driver's seat of your rental car. Many of the island's best sites can be dived without a boat, including the wreck of the *Superior Producer*. The beach at **Port Marie** rivals the site's reef for beauty, and offers top-notch facilities including a dive shop and restaurant, for that post-dive snack. **Nos Kas**, the house reef at Habitat Curaçao, is a

prime viewing spot for the coral spawning that occurs five days after the full moon in September and October.

(SCORE: 76.9)

7 Egyptian Red Sea

IF YOU WANT TO combine your diving with a little topside adventure in the Egyptian desert, head for Dahab on the Sinai Peninsula, where some dive centers use camels to transport divers and gear to remote shore-diving sites. Dahab's **Blue Hole** is a unique shore site—connected to land, the walls of this formation plunge more than 300 feet through the reef. Also near Dahab, **The Canyon** is a deep, cathedral-like chasm completely enclosed on all sides except for two openings in the ceiling.

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(SCORE: 76.5)

8 Maui, Hawaii

MAUI'S LEEWARD western shore is lined with great dive sites, including many that are accessible without a boat. From the Sheraton Hotel on Kaanapali Beach you can dive **Black Rock**, a shallow site that features a lava outcropping along with eagle rays, turtles and an unusual abundance of eels. There are more than five caves at the site known as **Five Caves**, and most of them are full of life. Expect turtles, whitetip sharks and lobster.

(SCORE: 72)

9 Grand Cayman

WHILE SHORE DIVING isn't the first thing that comes to many divers'

minds at the mention of Grand Cayman, there are a variety of great shore-accessible sites here. On the West End, try **Eden Rock** and **Devil's Grotto**, two sites with a network of caverns to explore. From **Sunset House**, you can visit one of the most-photographed underwater monuments in the world. You'll find the nine-foot bronze statue of Amphitrite in 50 feet of water, just a 10-minute swim from shore.

(SCORE: 66.7)

10 Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras

WHEN YOU'RE NOT on a dive boat searching for whale sharks, you can hit the beach. **Laguna Beach Resort** and **Utila Lodge** each offer shore diving from their facilities. At Laguna Beach, you can kick out 150 yards to find a wall that drops from 15 to over 100 feet. **SD**

HOW WE GOT THE SCORES

RESULTS ARE based on a response of more than 6,000 surveys. Readers rated dive destinations in a variety of categories on a scale of one to five. Scores listed here represent the percentage of fours (very good) and fives (excellent) awarded to each of these destinations in the shore diving category. A minimum number of responses was required for a destination to be included in these ratings.

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*Capt. MV Keith Tibbets,
Cayman Brac*

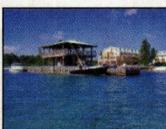
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photo

[Q U E S T]

16

OF THE MOST PHOTOGENIC SUBJECTS UNDER THE WAVES, AND THE BEST PLACES IN THE WORLD TO FIND THEM.

Great photography is like great cooking: It takes a lot of quality ingredients to produce something worthy of being served to guests. In photography, these ingredients include technical skill, favorable conditions and a little luck. But top professional photographers know that before they can begin to think about those elements, they have to know one thing: where to find the subjects they want to shoot. On the following pages, you'll find 16 stunning images of 16 stunning subjects. The one element all these photographs share is that the photographers who shot them knew where to go to make them happen. Join these pros for a whirlwind tour of some of the world's most productive underwater photo destinations.



NINGALOO REEF, AUSTRALIA

Whale Sharks

There are no fish in the sea bigger than whale sharks, and there's no destination more reliable for whale shark encounters than Ningaloo Reef, off Western Australia. As many as 300 of the gentle giants visit the waters around Ningaloo for several months each year, most consistently during the mass coral and invertebrate spawnings that follow seven days after the full moons in March and April. Whale sharks swim close to the surface, so many photographers choose to wear snorkel gear, allowing them to get in and out of the water quickly. Some dive operations here employ spotter planes to sight the sharks and then drop photographers right in their path. Whale sharks have great smiles, but I was intrigued by the size differential between the vertical tail fin of the animal and the diver next to it. To highlight this difference, I used a fisheye lens and got as close as possible to the subject. —AMOS NACHOUM

Other whale shark hot spots: Utila, Honduras; Galapagos Islands; southern Belize; Flower Garden Banks, Gulf of Mexico.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AMOS NACHOUM





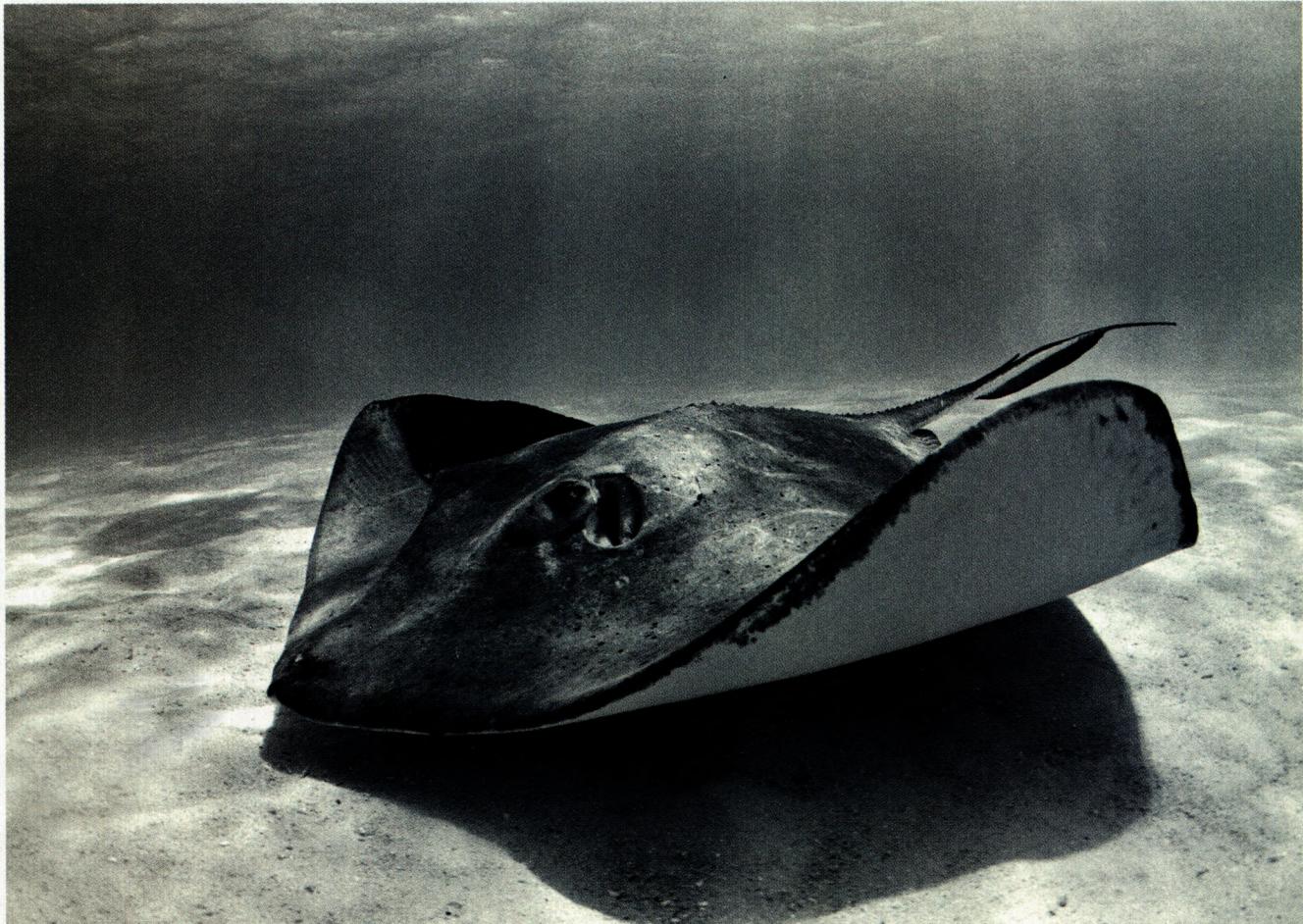
CHANNEL ISLANDS,
CALIFORNIA

Kelp Forests

The seas surrounding California's Channel Islands harbor one of the most diverse and rich marine environments in the world. But the water is cold, and it's giant forests of algae, not canyons of coral, that sustain life here. Sometimes called "redwoods of the sea," huge beds of giant kelp can be found around all the islands. Some of the most pristine kelp beds lie off the southern islands including San Clemente and Catalina Island. Growing as much as two feet a day from depths near 90 feet, these plants form dense canopies that support more than 1,000 species of plants and animals. On a clear day, with sunlight filtering through the canopy, it's hard to imagine a more spectacular subject for wide-angle photography. —

RALPH CLEVINGER

PHOTOGRAPH BY
RALPH CLEVINGER



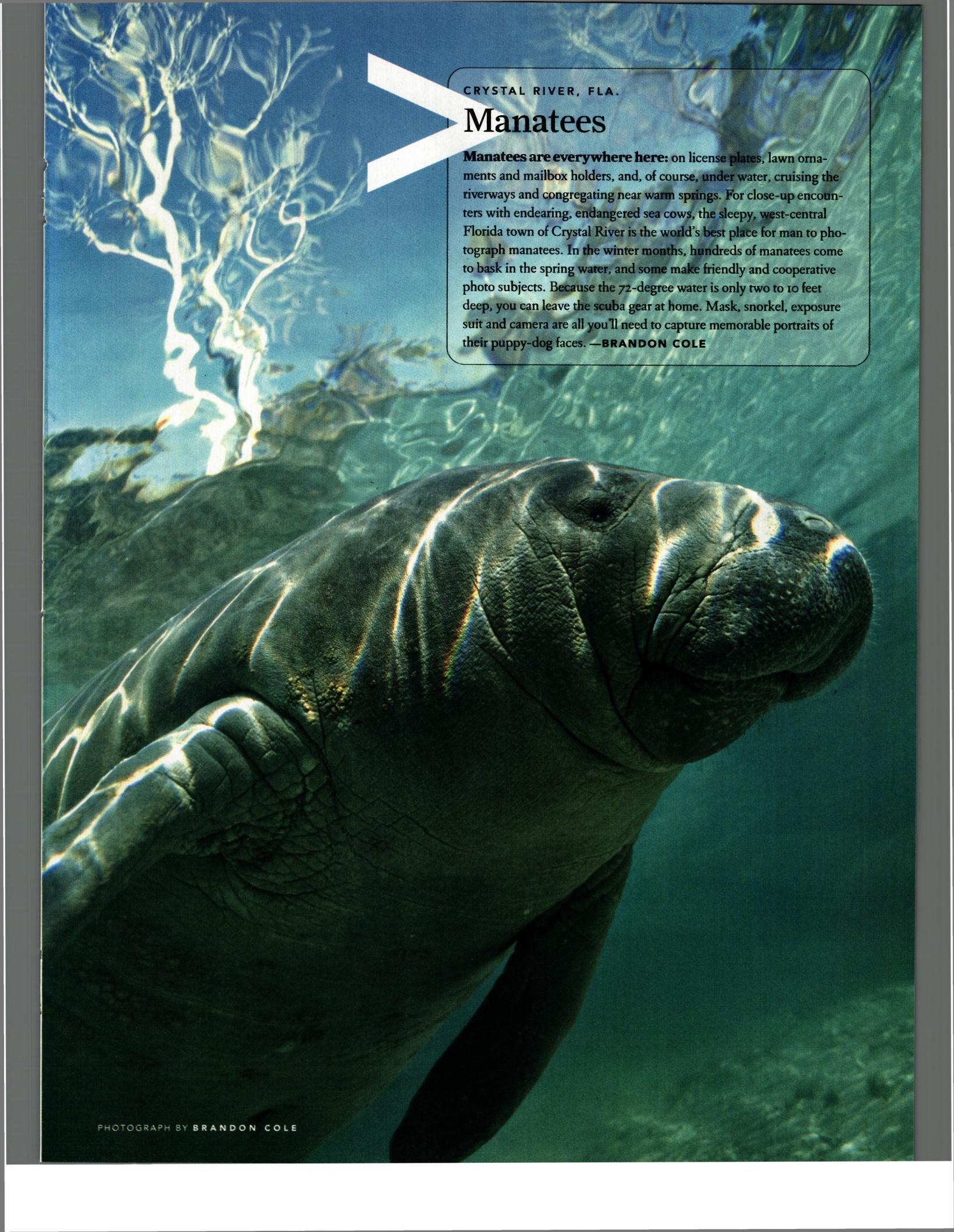
PHOTOGRAPH BY DONALD TIPTON

STINGRAY CITY, GRAND CAYMAN

Southern Stingrays

As familiar as stingrays may be to visitors to Grand Cayman's best-known dive site, it's their bizarre form that makes them such great photo subjects—their prehistoric eyes, their bird-like wings, their vacuum-cleaner mouths. At Stingray City, photographers have the opportunity to capture every detail of that alien form, and from every possible angle. You can shoot mobs of rays scrambling for a squid handout or a pair of rays posing with a diver. And, if you sneak away from the action to a quiet corner of this sandy site, you can capture a single stingray, dramatically lit, coming in for a soft landing. —DONALD TIPTON

Other stingray hot spots: Shark Ray Alley, Ambergris Caye, Belize; Gibbs Cay, Turks & Caicos.



CRYSTAL RIVER, FLA.

Manatees

Manatees are everywhere here: on license plates, lawn ornaments and mailbox holders, and, of course, under water, cruising the riverways and congregating near warm springs. For close-up encounters with endearing, endangered sea cows, the sleepy, west-central Florida town of Crystal River is the world's best place for man to photograph manatees. In the winter months, hundreds of manatees come to bask in the spring water, and some make friendly and cooperative photo subjects. Because the 72-degree water is only two to 10 feet deep, you can leave the scuba gear at home. Mask, snorkel, exposure suit and camera are all you'll need to capture memorable portraits of their puppy-dog faces. —BRANDON COLE

COCOS ISLAND

Hammerhead Sharks

Scalloped hammerheads aren't the only sharks found in abundance at Cocos Island, but they are the signature species of this remote volcanic outcrop and, in many ways, the most photogenic. The big sharks congregate here year-round and offer photographers the opportunity to capture dramatic wide-angle images of schools that number in the hundreds. The island, located more than 300 miles off Costa Rica, is reached by a 36-hour steam on a live-aboard dive boat. The long trip will give you the chance to practice breathing normally while imagining an endless parade of hammerheads in front of your lens. —AMOS NACHOUM

Other hammerhead hot spots: Galapagos Islands; Malpelo Island, Colombia; Baja, Mexico; Papua New Guinea; Rangiroa Atoll, French Polynesia.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AMOS NACHOUM



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES WATT

KANGAROO ISLAND, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Leafy Sea Dragons

Not known for warm water or lush reefs, Kangaroo Island is, however, one of the world's premier dive destinations, thanks to an exotic animal known as the leafy sea dragon. This rare member of the seahorse family can be found here in relative abundance. The best time to shoot sea dragons is during the Australian summer when the Southern Ocean loses some of its power and diving days increase. Sea dragons can grow up to 12 inches, so they're not exactly a macro subject. Some of the best images of sea dragons are taken with moderate wide-angle lenses that take in a bit of the kelp habitat of the dragons. —JAMES WATT



BAHAMA BANKS

Spotted Dolphins

Flat seas, rippling white sand and shallow, clear blue water: ideal conditions for an encounter with Atlantic spotted dolphins. Only several hours by boat from the coast of Florida, the Bahama Banks offer some of the best dolphin encounters in the world, especially during the summer when the sun is shining and the seas are warm and flat-calm. Spotted dolphins are extremely inquisitive, and will almost always come by to check you out at least once. Many dolphins will stick around if you keep them engaged by interacting with them. I slipped into the water with snorkel, mask and fins just ahead of this mixed pod of spotted and bottlenose dolphins and waited until they approached before diving down to get this shot. —

ERIC CHENG

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC CHENG





PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID DOUBILET

TASMANIA

Weird Fish

Floating below the belly of the Australian continent is the heart-shaped island state of Tasmania. In the southeast part of the island, the coastline forms a series of massive, dramatic cliffs. The continental shelf here is close to shore, and deep, cold water rolls up the slope into the shallows where dry-suit-clad divers have the unusual opportunity of encountering exotic deepwater creatures among kelp beds and bizarre deepwater sponge gardens. Among the species found here is the Tasmanian red handfish. Handfish are members of the anglerfish family and, like other anglerfish, their pectoral fins have evolved into appendages with elbows. Unlike other anglerfish, the fin tips of handfish do not end in paddles but in webbed hand-like structures that grip the shifting bottom. —DAVID DOUBILET



ROATAN, HONDURAS

Bottlenose Dolphins

While an open-water dolphin encounter in the wild is one of the true magical experiences in diving, there are a few places in the world where underwater photographers can be assured of encounters with captive dolphins. Anthony's Key Resort in Roatan, Honduras, is one of the best. The dolphin programs at AKR involve two options for visiting divers, an open-ocean encounter for scuba divers on a nearby coral reef, or a swim with the dolphins within the spacious enclosure at nearby Bailey's Key. At the Bailey's Key facility, they are often so intrigued with the camera dome, or perhaps their own reflection therein, sometimes they'll press their rostrum gently against the glass. —

STEPHEN FRINK

Soft Coral

Some of the most photogenic marine creatures in the world are the translucent Indo-Pacific soft corals in the genus *Dendronephthya*. Through a macro lens, the jewel-like colors and delicate details of the stalks glow with what seems to be an interior light. In wide view, the corals embellish the reef with blooms that any gardener would envy. The undisputed capital of the soft coral world is Fiji, an island chain that promotes growth with nutrient-rich currents and, at the same time, protects the corals from ocean swells. Because the soft corals are abundant and the visibility is consistently great, the most difficult thing about shooting the colors of Fiji's reefs is deciding which lens to use. —

PAUL HUMANN

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL HUMANN





PHOTOGRAPH BY DONALD TIPTON

SILVER BANK, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Humpback Whales

Very few experiences under water can compare with a face-to-face encounter with a humpback whale. Ninety miles north of the Dominican Republic lies Silver Bank, a large coral bank where North Atlantic humpbacks migrate each winter to mate and calve. A charter to Silver Bank allows you to strap on a snorkel (no scuba allowed) and slip into the water to photograph these 30- to 50-foot mammals. The most poignant encounters are with mother humpbacks and their young calves, swimming alongside. It's a sight that demonstrates a common bond between man and whale, and creates some of the ocean's most compelling photographic opportunities.

—DONALD TIPTON

Other humpback hot spots: Niue; Tonga; Maui, Hawaii.

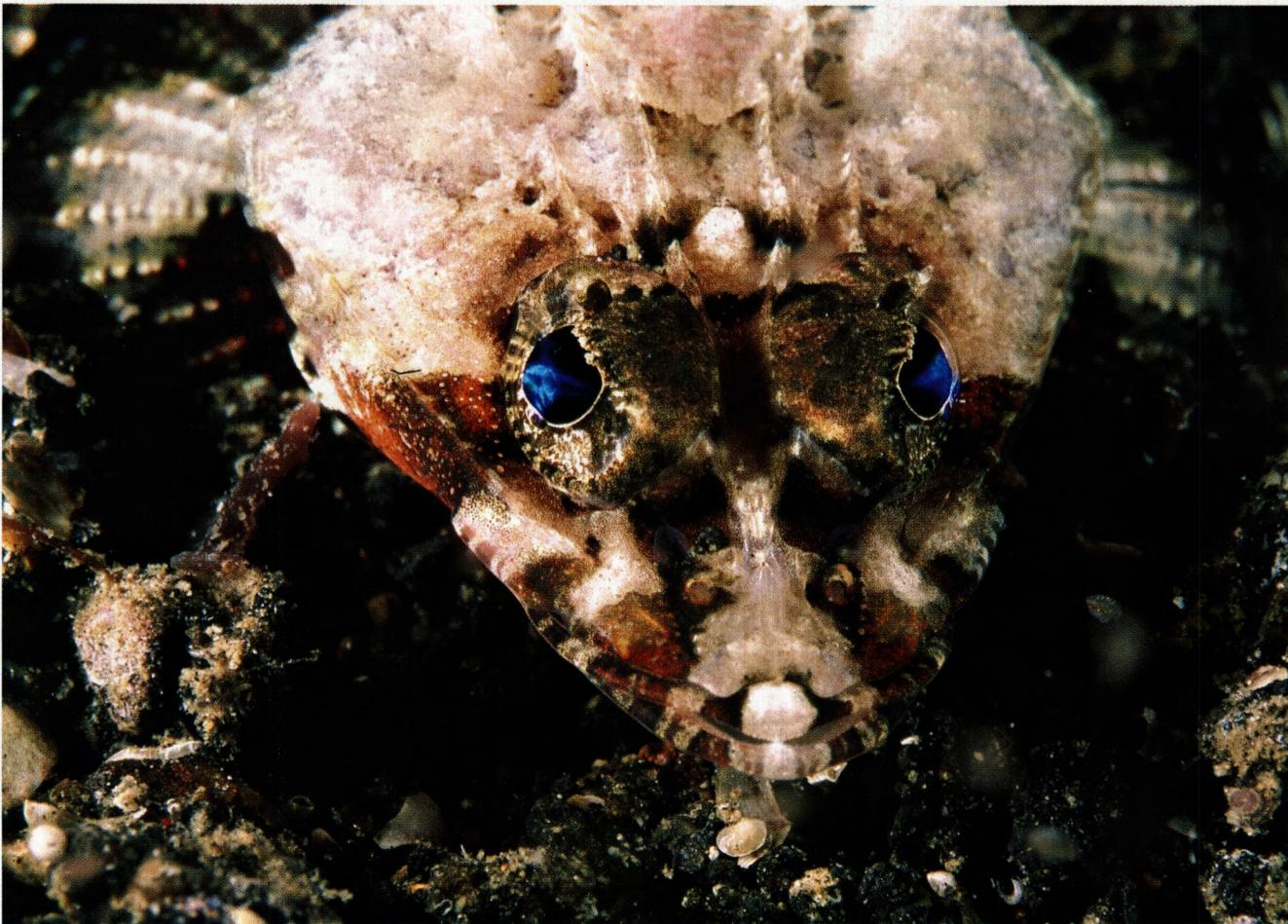


SANTA BARBARA ISLAND, CALIF.

Sea Lions

Because of the relative isolation of California's Channel Islands, the breeding areas of many species of marine mammals, including the ubiquitous California sea lion, have survived intact into the 21st century. All the islands have pinniped rookeries, but for sea lions, tiny Santa Barbara Island is one of the best. You'll find hundreds of sea lions in the water at the noisy rookery on the southeast end of the island. Swimming out to greet divers, dozens of young sea lions play around divers, blowing bubbles and biting fins, then follow you back to the boat to wait for the next round of divers. —RALPH CLEVENGER

PHOTOGRAPH BY RALPH CLEVENGER



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELE WESTMORLAND

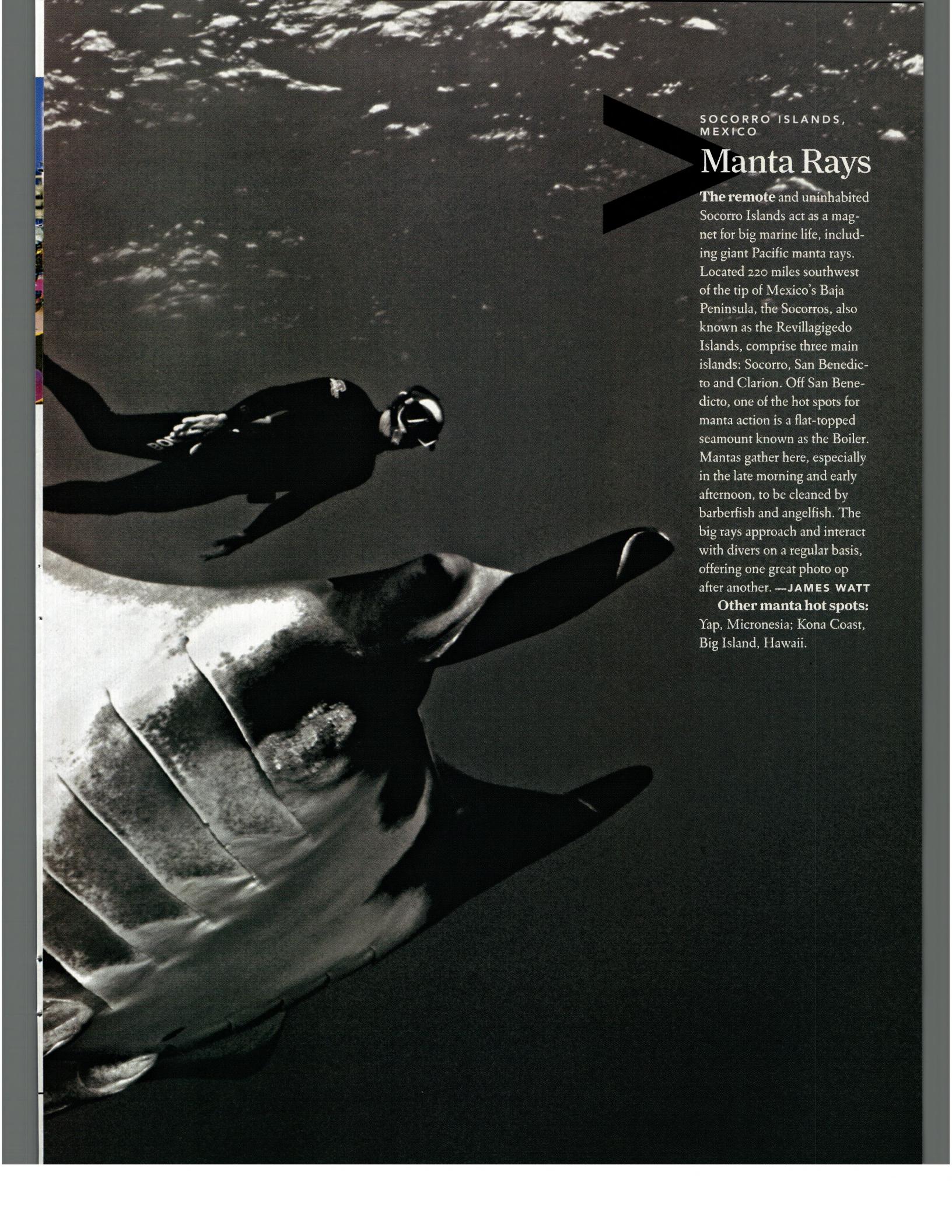
LEMBEH STRAIT, INDONESIA

Muck Creatures

Among macro photographers and other aficionados of strange creatures, Indonesia's Lembeh Strait is renowned as the muck-diving capital of the world. Here, you'll find a bizarre assortment of fishes and invertebrates: mimic octopuses, flamboyant cuttlefish, wartskin frogfish, ghost pipefishes, weedy scorpionfish and cockatoo waspfish. Off the northeast coast of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, Lembeh Strait is also known for its rich large-grain sand that is the perfect background for shooting the area's menagerie of weirdness. On a night dive, it was easy to spot the shimmering sapphire eyes of the spiny flathead (pictured above) peering out of the sand. —STUART AND MICHELE WESTMORLAND



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES WATT

A large manta ray swims in the ocean, its dark body contrasting with the lighter water. In the background, a diver in a wetsuit and mask is swimming. The sky above is filled with clouds.

SOCORRO ISLANDS,
MEXICO

Manta Rays

The remote and uninhabited Socorro Islands act as a magnet for big marine life, including giant Pacific manta rays. Located 220 miles southwest of the tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula, the Socorros, also known as the Revillagigedo Islands, comprise three main islands: Socorro, San Benedicto and Clarion. Off San Benedicto, one of the hot spots for manta action is a flat-topped seamount known as the Boiler. Mantas gather here, especially in the late morning and early afternoon, to be cleaned by barbelfish and angelfish. The big rays approach and interact with divers on a regular basis, offering one great photo op after another. —JAMES WATT

Other manta hot spots:
Yap, Micronesia; Kona Coast, Big Island, Hawaii.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC CHENG

GUADALUPE ISLAND, MEXICO

Great White Sharks

Most people think that a trip to South Africa or Australia is necessary for an encounter with great white sharks, but hop on a boat in San Diego and 22 hours later you can be surrounded by white sharks in the clear waters around Guadalupe Island. Guadalupe is approximately 250 miles from San Diego, and every fall up to 100 great white sharks visit the island, offering an adrenaline-pumping experience to intrepid adventurers and photographers willing to endure the long boat ride from the States. All of the shark viewing in Guadalupe is done from the safety of sturdy metal cages, but you'll still have to sign a waiver to get in the water. —**ERIC CHENG**

Other great white hot spots: South Africa; Australia.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Cold-Water Invertebrates

What the cold waters of British Columbia lack in coral cover, they more than make up for with an astounding variety of invertebrate life. Pink, orange, white and lavender anemones, lacy basket stars, giant nudibranchs, jellyfish and cloud sponges form a polychromatic backdrop on most dive sites. And crawling among these more stationary inverts, you'll find decorator crabs, hermit crabs, red rock crabs and Puget Sound king crabs (pictured here). This image was shot in an area known as the Sunshine Coast. As along most of the coast here, the underwater sunshine comes only in the winter months. From December through March, you can find 150-foot visibility to make the most of B.C.'s kaleidoscope of underwater colors. —DAVID B. FLEETHAM

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID B. FLEETHAM



LESSONS FOR

Life

By Michael Ange

FILE :

71
#

(THIS IS A TRUE STORY
BUT THE NAMES HAVE
BEEN CHANGED.)

RIVER BLINDNESS

In the low visibility of a busy river channel, one diver loses his way and his life.

COLIN HEARD THE THRUMMING PROPELLERS coming closer and closer. The noise was almost deafening, but in the dark water he couldn't tell which direction it was coming from and he couldn't see the vessel anywhere around. What had started out as a fun dive for artifacts had quickly turned into a blackwater nightmare. Circling in the water, he searched frantically for the rest of his dive group but found only darkness. Disoriented and confused, Colin finally decided to try to make his escape by submerging deeper into the river channel. He started to descend and felt the pressure wave from the bow only a fraction of a second before the hull of the barge slammed into his body.

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LESSONS FOR LIFE

THE DIVER

Colin was an active diver with both civilian and military scuba training. He was in his mid-40s and in excellent health. Colin worked out regularly and dived between 10 and 15 times a year.

THE DIVE

When invited to dive in nearly black water at a popular river dive site, Colin jumped at the opportunity to get wet. In spite of the poor visibility, the site was popular with local divers as a place to find fossilized sharks' teeth and other artifacts. It was a sweltering summer day and the heat was almost unbearable,

divers in the group immediately submerged and began sifting silt on the bottom, searching for the elusive artifacts they came to find.

THE ACCIDENT

Approximately 45 minutes into the dive, the divers realized they had no idea where they were. The group surfaced and were surprised to find that they had nearly crossed the entire span of the river and had moved a substantial distance down current from the dive boat. Each of the divers shot a quick compass heading, and Colin submerged with the group to about 10 or 15 feet to begin the swim back to the boat.

The barge operator had no clue that divers were in his path until he heard the thud of Colin's tank against the hull.

even in the early morning hours when the divers boarded the dive boat for the short run downriver. Colin was diving with a group of eight divers and using a charter operation that frequently took guests to the site.

After arriving in the area of the dive, the captain pulled the boat alongside the shore, raised the dive flag and tied up to the bank. He gave a detailed briefing of the site, explaining to the divers that the river had a lot of large boat traffic and that it was necessary either to stay very close to the banks of the river or to stay on the bottom if venturing toward the center of the river.

Colin and some of his buddies were busy assembling gear and apparently missed this part of the briefing. The divers quickly suited up and entered the water in a large group. Colin and several other

As the dive group crossed the river, a barge rounded a nearby bend. The other divers reported that it was obvious under water that a boat was coming. With only a couple of feet of visibility, the divers became separated as they attempted to descend to the bottom and swim as quickly as possible from the channel of the river. Colin, however, did not submerge deep enough or fast enough.

No one in the group was towing a dive flag, and the barge operator had no clue that divers were in his path until he felt and heard the thud of Colin's tank against the hull.

Colin's body rolled to the surface in the wake of the barge. He sustained massive injuries, and although he was immediately recovered by the other divers in his group, it was too late. Colin was already dead.

Catch the adventure

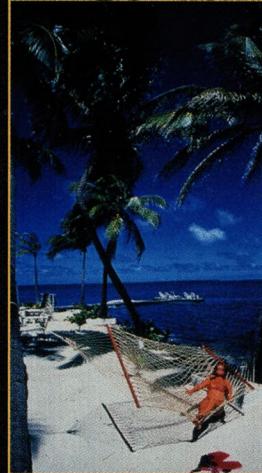
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ANALYSIS

The first mistake Colin's group made was failing to use a dive flag. Both local and federal laws require the use of the internationally recognized alpha flag and, in most cases, the familiar red and white diver-down flag when diving in navigable waters. When a flag is used in a restricted channel such as a river, in most jurisdictions, the divers are required to remain within 50 feet of the flag. Although a flag was prominently displayed on the dive boat, Colin was several hundred yards away from the flag at the time of the accident.

Even if one of the divers had been towing a dive flag, there would have been little the barge operator could have done to avoid the group, given the confining width of the channel and the size of the barge. Colin's group should have heeded the dive captain's advice and remained closer to the banks of the river. Once the mistake became obvious, Colin should have descended all the way to the bottom and waited for the boat to pass. **SD**

LESSONS FOR LIFE

- 1 NEVER DIVE IN RESTRICTED**, navigable waterways where large vessel traffic is likely.
- 2 ALWAYS USE A DIVE FLAG** and remain within the specified circle of protection provided by the flag.
- 3 TOW A SURFACE MARKER** with a dive flag attached anytime your dive plan requires you to leave the protected area of the surface flag.
- 4 DIVE BRIEFINGS** contain vital information. Stop what you're doing, listen carefully and heed the advice of the crew.

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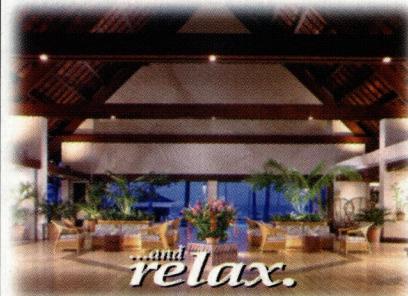
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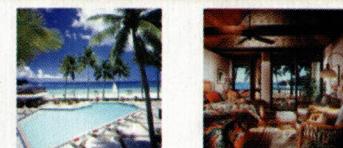


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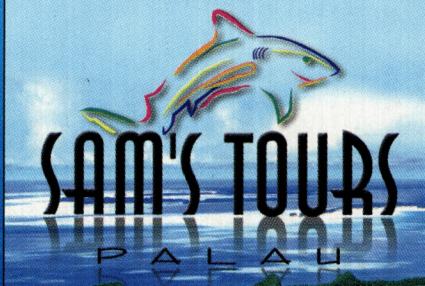
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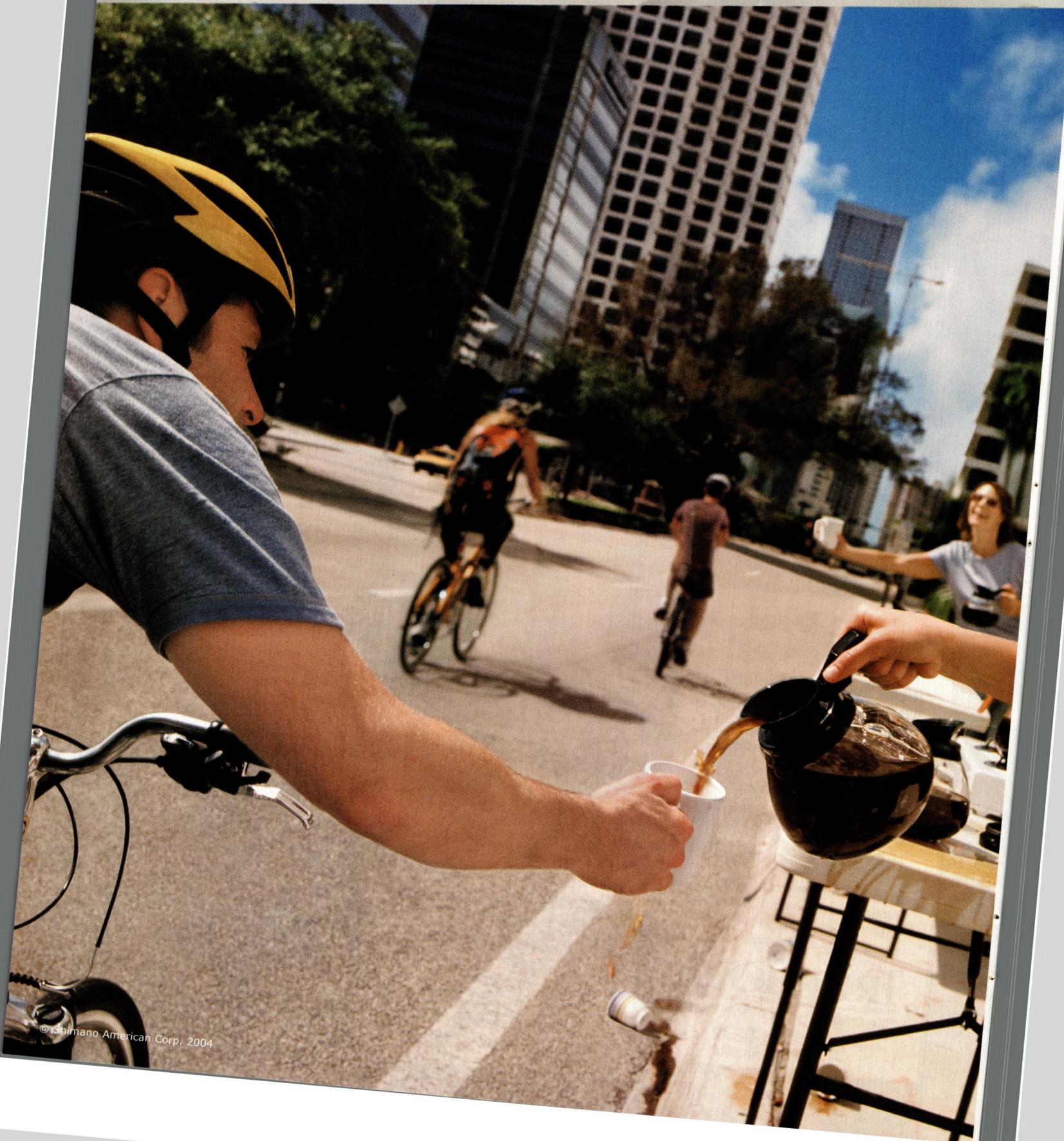


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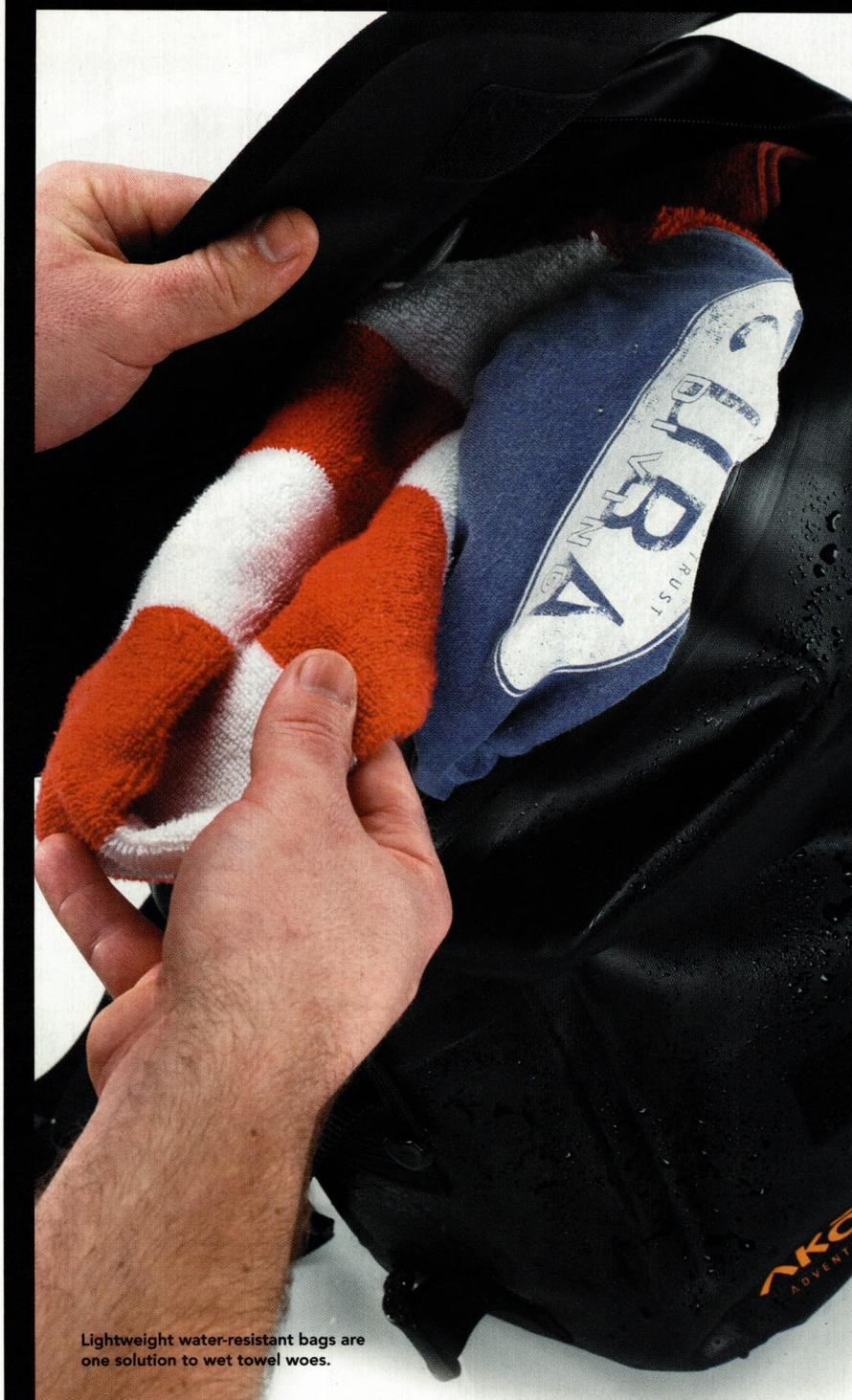
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Gear



SCUBA LAB

Dry Bags & Boxes

Nine surefire ways to keep your stuff dry while you get wet. **BY**

JOHN BRUMM

EVERYBODY eventually learns that when you're out on a dive boat, or even on a beach dive, while your immediate goal is to be wet, your long-term goal is to be dry again. And the best way to ensure that happens is to stow your after-dive street clothes, jackets, wallets and whatnots in a bag specifically designed to keep its contents dry in a wet environment.

THREE CATEGORIES, LOTS OF CHOICES

THE BAGS AND BOXES reviewed here fall into three basic categories: water-resistant bags that can be splashed, waterproof bags that can be splashed as well as temporarily dunked, and submersible bags and boxes that can actually be submerged while still keeping their contents dry.

To determine whether or not these bags and boxes could actually keep gear dry, we filled each with newspaper, sealed it according to the manufacturer's instructions and sprayed it aggressively with a garden hose. Then we dried the bag and looked inside to see if any of the newspaper got wet. If not, we resealed the bag and dunked it under water for 30 seconds, then dried and checked inside again.

DRY BAGS & BOXES



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DryBag



STAHL SAC
Bone Dry Storage Bag

THE RESULTS IN A NUTSHELL

EACH OF THESE BAGS AND BOXES performed as advertised. Water-resistant bags were able to easily withstand a garden hose attack, but succumbed to a dunking. Waterproof bags scoffed at the water blasts and even held their breath through a brief dunking. Submersible bags and boxes weren't fazed by either hose spray or a prolonged dunking, and we got the feeling no amount of time spent under water was going to change that.

THE BAGS

AKONA AKB724 Dry Shoulder Bag

The most stylish of the bags reviewed, the water-resistant AKB724 is the size of a large-volume, shoulder-slung, soft-sided briefcase. Constructed of polyurethane-double-coated 600-denier nylon, its main compartment secures with a double-pull zipper and can easily handle a jacket, extra clothes, camera and towel. An internal mesh sleeve is per-

fect for wallets and keys. This main compartment is protected from direct splash by an over flap that also has a zippered pocket.

The seams in this bag are thermal-welded for a waterproof bond, but the zippers are only water-resistant, and our spray test succeeded in getting a few drops inside the over flap pocket. However, the main compartment stayed dry, and was able to remain so even when lowered into water, just as long as the zipper itself wasn't submerged.

The bag comes with a nice shoulder strap plus a cross strap for additional stability. There's a pad where the bag rests on your hip that allows air to circulate.

MARINE SPORTS Dry Pak

Made of 10-ounce vinyl, the Dry Pak is a straightforward top-loading waterproof bag. It comes in three sizes. The model we looked at was the medium size. This bag is suited for stowing one thin jacket, an extra T-shirt or two and a towel, plus a camera and bagged lunch.

The opening is a tad small, which prohibits packing bulky gear. The bag uses a fold-and-roll closure, with a short over flap to help protect against seepage and a strip of one-inch webbing to aid in a tight roll. The bag doesn't have any handles, but once the clips are connected, you can grab onto that.

After putting four rolls in the opening and clipping it together, the Dry Pak successfully defended its name. It easily resisted water intrusion during both spray and dunk tests. The Dry Pak is available in yellow or clear.

SEASOFT SCUBA DryBag

This water-resistant duffel-style DryBag from Seasoft (formerly Watermark) is actually designed to keep your wet gear from making a mess in your dry trunk. The idea is to exit the dive site sopping wet, step onto the provided two- by three-foot mat (permanently attached to the bag, it rolls up when not in use), shed your gear and drop it directly into the bag.

Made of polymer-impregnated vinyl with RFW (radio frequency welded) seams, this glutinous bag—no pockets, just one large stowage compartment—can easily consume all your dripping dive gear and then neatly contain the mess. Its side-loading zippered opening is huge for easy access. It comes with double duffel handles and a removable shoulder strap. The bag's body is waterproof, but the zipper is vulnerable to spray.

STAHL SAC Bone Dry Storage Bag

This is one spiffy waterproof bag. Sporting welded seams throughout, the Bone Dry is

made of 840-denier nylon with a heavy polyurethane coating. It uses a fold-and-roll closure, but with a couple of important differences. One, the initial mating of the side-loading opening involves pressing together a rubber seal like a huge Ziploc, which makes the opening watertight even without folding. Two, once you fold the sealed opening a couple times, instead of connecting the buckle clips together, you clip them to buckles on each side of the bag, then connect additional cross straps for further security. The result is a very neat waterproof container. Neither direct spray nor prolonged dunk tests could coax any water inside this bag.

The Bone Dry isn't long enough to serve as a dry suit gear bag, but it provides plenty of room for an extra change of clothes, jacket and towel, plus a camera or two and assorted small stuff. Double duffel handles make it easy to carry around. Stahlsac's lifetime warranty covers just about everything, including damage caused by airline handlers.



XS SCUBA
Sedona Large Dry Duffel

TRIPLE-L Sahara

The Sahara is kind of a combo bag. On the one hand, it has two outside pockets that are only marginally water-resistant; on the other hand, it has a roomy main compartment that's not only waterproof but submersible.

This main compartment can easily accommodate a full set of dry clothes, a camera and a handful of smaller items. It has a watertight zipper with a rubber overseal and, in the event you'd want to take the bag under water, there's an oral inflator tube to compensate for compression at depth. The rest of the bag is not suited for submersible use, however.

There are external compression straps so you can cinch down on a half-load, and the backpack is nicely contoured and padded. The bag also has straps for beach towels.

**USIA Multi-Purpose
Waterproof Bag**

Tested to 100 feet, this tough little monkey is made of 400-denier polyurethane-coated pack



TRIPLE-L
Sahara



USIA Multi-Purpose
Waterproof Bag

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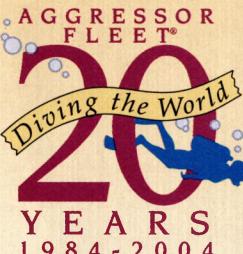
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Photos by Rod Klein and Wayne Hasson.

DRY BAGS & BOXES

cloth. It uses a dry suit-style zipper and double heat-taped seams to withstand the pressures of depth. An oral inflator allows you to inflate the bag to compensate for compression. Needless to say, our spray and dunk tests had no effect whatsoever on this rugged bag.

Although it was originally designed for the military to stow a gas mask, the bag can be used to carry small, valuable items that need to stay dry and protected. The heavy-duty zipper is long, allowing for easy loading and unloading. The bag can be threaded onto a belt, and there are two web loops that can be used as tie-down points. A 1,000-denier cordura liner bag is included.

XS SCUBA Sedona Large Dry Duffel

This fold-and-roll duffel-style bag is perfect in design and dimensions to handle the specialized gear required for dry suit diving. A fabric dry suit, a set of woolies, an extra T-shirt and shorts, socks, a pair of deck shoes, towels and smaller items, like wallets, all fit into the Sedona with room to spare.

Made of a 600-denier nylon with a light coating of polyurethane on the



OTTER PRODUCTS
6500 Series Dry Box

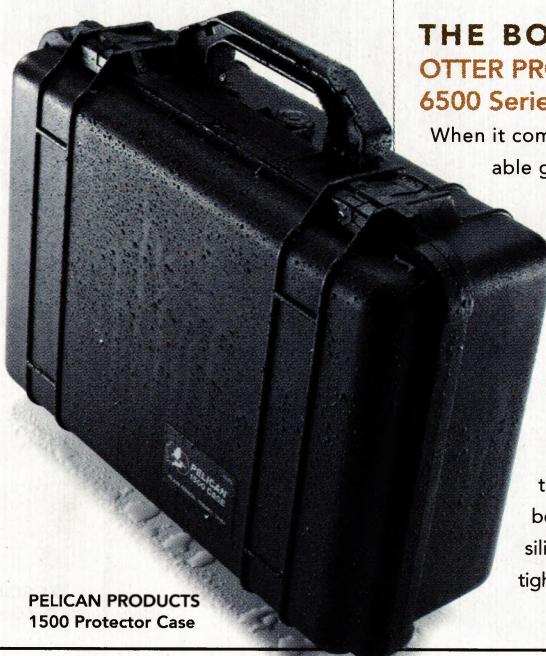
outside and a double coating on the inside, Sedona has RF-welded seams and its large side-loading opening has double stiffener strips that create a tight roll without any bunching in the middle. Like Stahlsac's Bone Dry, the Sedona's security buckles clip to the ends of the bag instead of each other. Plus, there are cross straps to help secure the folded opening and snug up the load.

The bag provides double duffel straps with a Velcro wrap, plus there are attachment points for an optional shoulder strap. A small external pocket on the outside of the bag has an additional zippered sleeve, but they both got damp from direct spray, although the main compartment remained totally dry.

THE BOXES

OTTER PRODUCTS 6500 Series Dry Box

When it comes to protecting valuable gear, nothing beats the security of a hard case. Otter makes a full line of hard cases; the 6500 is its largest. Made of fiberglass-reinforced ABS plastic, it's equipped with compound latches and a rod hinge that runs almost the entire length of the box. The lid is fitted with a silicone gasket for a watertight seal. There's a pressure



PELICAN PRODUCTS
1500 Protector Case

relief valve that can be totally unscrewed, which we found kind of troubling. However, the box is truly watertight; neither spray nor dunk tests could produce any moisture inside.

The test case came equipped with a detachable shoulder strap. We really liked this option. The case has a fold-down carry handle, and molded eyes are provided for a padlock. The case includes foam that can be custom cut to fit your valuables. All Otter boxes are guaranteed for life to be watertight and crushproof.

PELICAN PRODUCTS 1500 Protector Case

Considered the last word in unbreakable, waterproof hard cases, the Pelican 1500 Protector is one of a family of cases available in about 20 different sizes, all designed to keep valuable gear dry and in one piece. This virtually indestructible case is made of a high-impact structural copolymer polypropylene. It uses a quarter-inch neoprene O-ring for water-tightness (it floats in salt water with a 35-pound load), heavy-duty hinges, special ABS latches, molded padlock eyes for security and a purge valve that automatically equalizes the interior compartment after changes in atmospheric pressure. Needless to say, nothing we did to this box allowed any water on the inside.

The 1500 comes with foam or adjustable padded dividers to enable you to customize the box to your personal gear while protecting it all against vibration or shock. Like all Pelican hard cases, the 1500 is covered by an unconditional lifetime guarantee against breakage or defects. 

GET MORE For more information about these bags and boxes, turn to In Depth, page 105, section 4.



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SCUBA LAB REVIEW

Bailout Bottles

Extra air for when there's trouble down there. **BY JOHN BRUMM**

MOST DIVERS giant stride into the water armed with either a safe-second octopus rig or some sort of BC-integrated alternate air source as part of their gear inventory. Both of these backup breathers are essential in the event your primary second stage malfunctions or your buddy needs to share your air supply. But neither is going to be much help if you suddenly find yourself on the bottom of the ocean strapped to an empty cylinder.

Enter the bailout bottle, a compact, easy-to-use emergency air supply completely independent of your primary tank and regulator. It's designed to do one thing and one thing only—give you a few extra breaths to get to the surface when all else fails.

Unlike pony bottle systems, which are much larger and use their own conventional regulator rigs, a bailout bottle is small and simple, consisting of an integrated regulator that screws directly onto a low-volume 3,000 psi bottle. It stows in its own holster that you can attach to a BC strap or anywhere that's handy. It's always "on," so to use it, you simply yank it from its holster, stick it in your mouth, and start kicking like crazy for blue skies.

Since their introduction over two decades ago, bailout bottles have been the subject of much debate. Based on air consumption calculations, opponents argue that the typical bailout bottle is simply too small to get a panicked diver safely to the surface from the deepest recreational depths. But proponents like the insurance of having a completely separate air supply and argue that having even a few extra breaths at your disposal sure beats sucking seawater.

So what can these bailout bottles really do for you in an out-of-air situation? To find out, we rounded up three models—two tried-and-true, one relatively new—and went diving. Making 10 dives over the course of three nonconsecutive days, we took each bottle to 132 feet. Upon exhalation, we deployed the bailout bottle and tried to make it to the surface. If a bottle couldn't get us to the surface, we tried progressively shallower depths until it could.

While we strived to simulate a semi-panicked diver in an out-of-air situation, our ascents never exceeded the maximum ascent rates dictated by our dive computers. Plus, we knew that if we sucked the bottles dry, we still had our primary air supply to fall back on, so we may have lacked the same motivation to get to the surface that would grip divers in authentic out-of-air emergencies. So while our findings are not conclusive, we hope this will shed some light on what these bottles can do in a pinch.

SUBMERSIBLE SYSTEMS
Spare Air 300



SUBMERSIBLE SYSTEMS
Spare Air 170

SUBMERSIBLE SYSTEMS
Spare Air 300

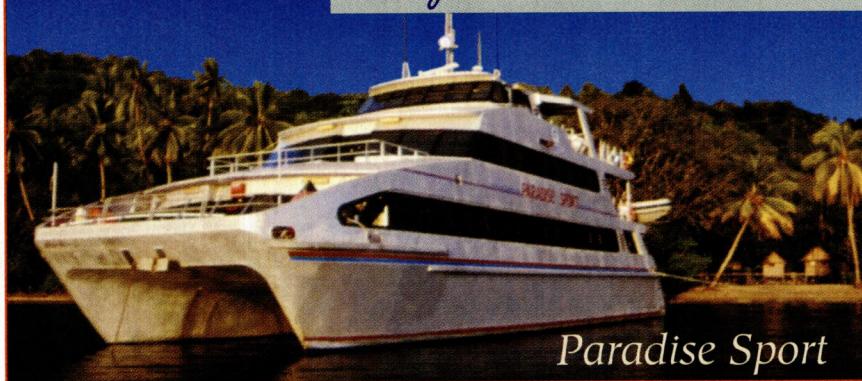
When most divers think of a bailout bottle, it's the Spare Air that pops to mind. Measuring just over 13 inches tall with a two-and-a-quarter-inch-diameter, three-cubic-foot bottle, Spare Air's Model 300 weighs just over two pounds when full and stows quite compactly in

a custom holster that can easily be mounted on your BC cummerbund or tank strap.

The Spare Air uses a balanced, single-stage, integrated regulator that screws directly onto the bottle. Work of breathing is not as good as a traditional regulator, but the compact bottle and the holster system make it easy to deploy one-handed. Once the rig is in your mouth,

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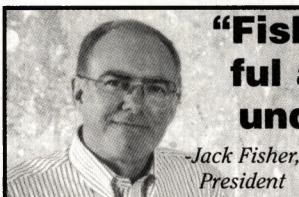
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BAILOUT BOTTLES

you don't need to hold onto the bottle. The Spare Air 300 was able to easily get our test divers from 70 feet to the surface with about half a dozen additional surface breaths to spare.

Spare Air's Model 300 fills off your primary cylinder via a yoke adapter. There's also a fitting that allows it to be filled directly from a fill station or compressor. A built-in pressure indicator nub protrudes when the bottle is full, and sits flush when the bottle is less than half full. A dial pressure gauge is available as an option.

The Spare Air 300 sells for \$299. Price includes a three-cubic-foot bottle with single-stage reg, a built-in pressure indicator, a yoke-style adapter for filling off a scuba tank, a storage holster and safety lanyard. The Model 300 is also available in a nitrox version. Spare Air has a one-year warranty.

SUBMERSIBLE SYSTEMS

Spare Air 170

This is the original bailout bottle, introduced back in 1979. It's the same as the Model 300 except for its smaller package. Standing less than nine inches tall with a two-and-a-quarter-inch-diameter, 1.7-cubic-foot bottle, the 170 weighs only 1.5 pounds when full and easily stows just about anywhere you can attach its holster. Because of its super-compact size, the Model 170 is a favorite among traveling divers who prefer to dive with a little added insurance.

The Spare Air 170 was able to easily get test divers from a depth of 45 feet to the surface with about half a dozen surface breaths to spare. It sells for \$299 and comes with a 1.7-cubic-foot bottle with single-stage reg, a built-in pressure indicator, an adapter for filling off a scuba tank, a storage holster, a safety lanyard and a one-year warranty. A dial gauge pressure indicator is optional.

H2ODYSSEY Extra Air Source

The six-cubic-foot EAS was the only bailout bottle we tested that was able to get us from 132 feet (maximum recommended recreational diving depth) to the surface, and it did so with more than a dozen additional surface breaths to spare. Of course, standing over 13 inches tall with a three-inch-diameter cylinder that weighs five pounds when full, it's also the largest bailout bottle



H2ODYSSEY
Extra Air Source

we tested, and probably about as big as you'd want to carry around without moving into pony bottle territory.

What makes the EAS unique is its regulator system, which uses a conventional second stage connected to a balanced piston first stage via a horizontal/vertical swivel. The swivel enables you to maintain a comfortable breathing position regardless of the angle of the bottle. The EAS delivers the kind of easy breathing performance you'd expect from your primary second stage. This performance no doubt contributed to the system's air efficiency on our ascents.

When full, the EAS is just slightly negative, so it hangs out of the way and is surprisingly easy to use with no hands. Indeed, there were times we forgot we were breathing off a bailout bottle and not our primary reg. However, because of the swivel, sometimes you need to hold the bottle with one hand and steady the second stage with the other before inserting it into your mouth. Also, the bottle gets buoyant as it nears empty. At this point, you need to hold onto the bottle; otherwise, the swivel allows the bottle to float up in front of your face.

The EAS fills directly off your primary cylinder via a yoke-style adapter. There's also a fitting that allows it to be filled directly from a fill station or compressor. The EAS sells for \$299, which includes the six-cubic-foot bottle with first and second stages plus connecting swivel. Options include the adapter for filling off a scuba tank, a holster and a dial pressure gauge. It has a two-year warranty. **SD**

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OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS

Q: Should I be concerned about using over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants when diving?

A: No drug is completely safe. Drugs are chemicals and, by design, alter body functions through their therapeutic action. Moreover, they may have undesirable effects that vary by individual or environment. Most drugs have never been specifically tested in a diving or hyperbaric environment, but by understanding their usual actions and side effects it may be possible to predict what might happen when divers use them. So, research your medications. Learn their active ingredients. Warnings and directions provided by the manufacturer may alert you to the potential for a problem.

Antihistamines are most often used to provide symptomatic relief of allergies, colds and motion sickness. They may have side effects including dryness of the mouth, nose and throat, and blurred vision. A side effect of many antihistamines is drowsiness, which could exacerbate nitrogen narcosis and impair a diver's ability to think clearly and react appropriately as needed. If an antihistamine is used by a diver, it should ideally be one of the less sedating type.

Decongestants cause narrowing of the blood vessels, which can relieve congestion by reducing swelling of the nasal mucosa. Decongestants may cause mild CNS stimulation and may have side effects such as nervousness, excitability, restlessness, dizziness, weakness, and a forceful or rapid heartbeat. These drugs can cause blood pressure to increase, particularly in people with hypertension. Medications known to stimulate the CNS may have a significant or undesirable effect on a diver. Package precautions or warnings may advise against use by individuals suffering from diabetes, asthma or cardiovascular disease.

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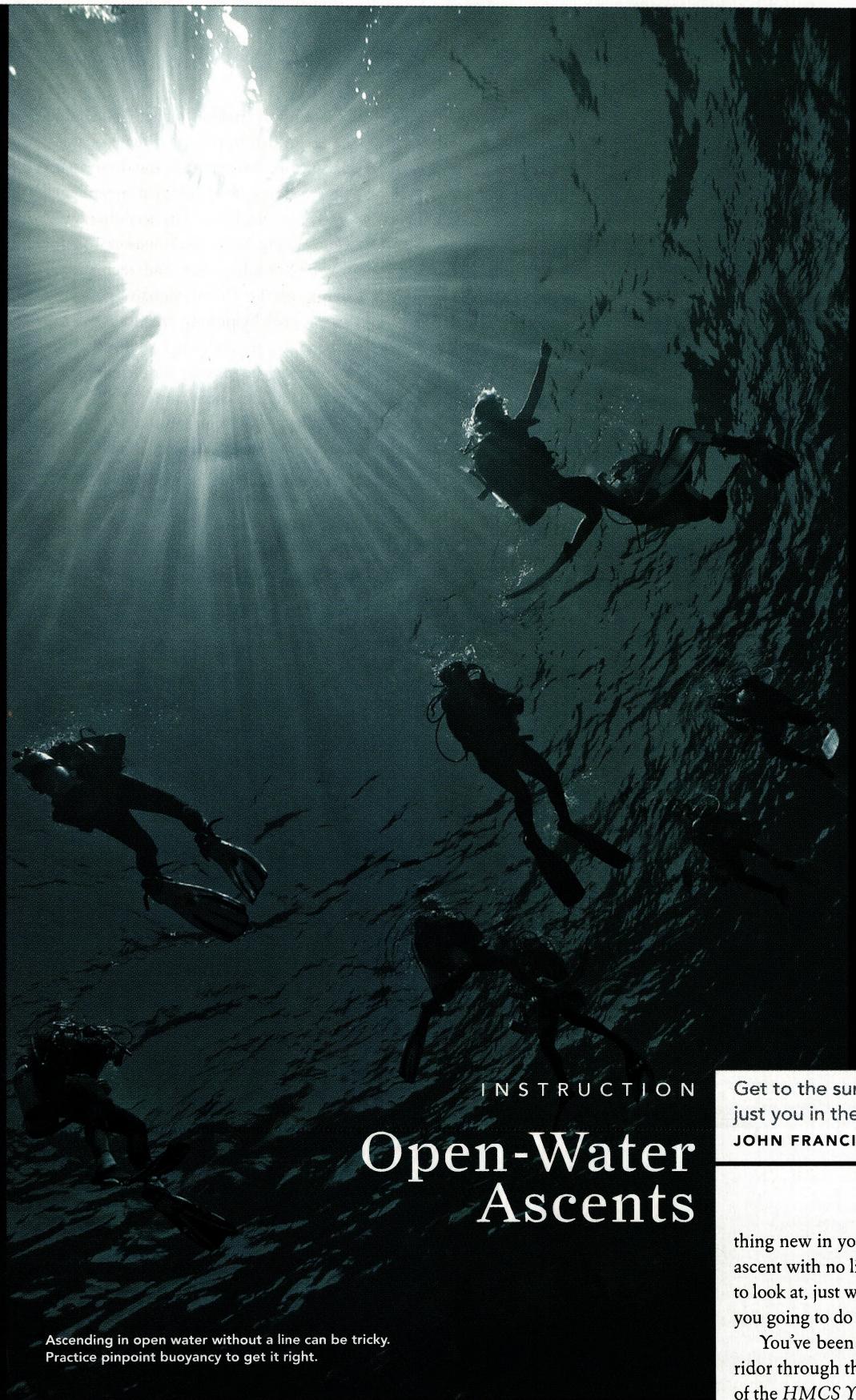
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Open-Water Ascents

Ascending in open water without a line can be tricky.
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CHRIS CRUMLEY

Get to the surface safely when it's just you in the deep blue. **BY**

JOHN FRANCIS

UH-OH. You're looking at something new in your experience: a 95-foot ascent with no line to hang on to or wall to look at, just water all around. How are you going to do this?

You've been following a zigzag corridor through the crazy sideways world of the *HMCS Yukon*, the 366-foot-long

destroyer escort that has become such a popular dive attraction near San Diego. You and your buddy had planned an exit point next to one of the mooring lines attached to the ship so you could use it to control your ascent, but the line's not there. Is it to the left or right? You're not sure. And how far away? Maybe too far, because your buddy is pointing to his pressure gauge with some urgency. There's no time to look for the line. You've got to start up now.

A controlled, no-line ascent from depth in open water is a challenge, but it's not impossible—if you keep your head and take it step by step.

(STEP ONE)

Do Nothing

WHAT'S FIRST? Assuming you're not

critically short on air, stop, take a deep breath or two, and collect your wits. You'll have enough breathing gas if you've planned the dive and decided in advance to turn back when the first diver reaches a minimum psi.

What's that minimum? There are several rules of thumb. Dan Patterson, a technical diving instructor at Forty Fathom Grotto in Ocala, Fla., allows 10 psi for every foot of depth down to 130 feet, assuming no decompression stops. That would mean turning a dive to the Yukon's maximum depth of 100 feet at 1,000 psi. Others suggest 1,000 psi for any dive to 100 feet or more.

(STEP TWO)

Communicate

YOU AND YOUR BUDDIES need to

communicate before you act. You should have clarified in advance what your signals mean. For example, the thumbs-up sign is ambiguous. Does it mean, "get ready to ascend" or "start up right now"? Gary Billingsley, a PADI master instructor who teaches tech and recreational diving on the Yukon, signals "go to the ascent line" by putting one fist above the other, as if climbing a rope. The thumbs-up he reserves for the command to actually start ascending.

"Once you communicate to your teammate that it's time to ascend, communicate why," says Patterson. "Point to your computer or your pressure gauge so he knows why you've turned the dive." And your signal should be acknowledged with the same signal returned, not an OK sign, so you know your buddy has actually understood.

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(STEP THREE)

Get Neutral

NEUTRAL BUOYANCY is going to be a moving target as you ascend, so get it squarely in your sights now. At the same time, you should put away your toys so your hands are free to manage your BC controls and your gauges. Cameras, lights and other stuff not needed now should be clipped off or put into a pocket.

(STEP FOUR)

Leave the Bottom

YOU AND YOUR BUDDY should make eye contact, exchange the OK and thumbs-up signs, take inflate/deflate control in hand and initiate the ascent. Eye contact throughout the ascent will help you stay together and in control.

If you're exactly neutral, you'll be able to lift off the bottom just by taking a deep breath. But if that doesn't do it, should you put air in your BC? Instructors who teach deep recreational diving differ on that. Many, like Bob Snyder—who leads divers to the *Spiegel Grove* off Key Largo, Fla.—prefer you to be slightly negative and fin a little to ascend. "Do not hit that power inflate button," says Snyder. "I would rather see you do a little bit of a leg kick than to use buoyancy to bring you up."

He's aware, of course, that a little positive buoyancy can easily become too much. But Patterson and a few others worry that finning upward means unnecessary exertion and carbon dioxide production, and therefore more risk of narcosis and DCS. He likes divers to be "positively neutral," as he calls it, and

suggests a tap on the power inflate is fine to start the ascent. "I emphasize in my courses not to be scared to use the BC to do its job. And that's to help the diver initiate his ascent."

Actually, these instructors differ only a little. All of them agree you should be as close to neutral as you can be throughout the ascent. "Use a little common sense," says Billingsley. "If you're swimming up and you're not going anywhere, just tap the BC a couple of times until you get going. And look up. Your body tends to follow your eyes."

(STEP FIVE)

Vent Air While You Ascend

ONCE YOU'RE MOVING upward, immediately begin venting a little air

110 foot wall

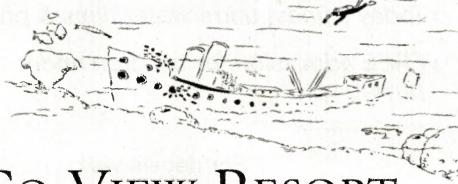
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from your BC, because the air bubble in your BC will immediately begin growing and adding buoyancy. If you're over-weighted, the BC bubble will be bigger, and your buoyancy will increase faster. Cold water complicates the problem, because a wetsuit or dry suit also expands, like another bubble.

Without a mooring line in front of you to judge your upward speed, it will be very difficult to keep your rate down to 30 feet per minute, and if you wait to vent air until you realize you are going too fast, you've waited too long. At that point you're likely to vent too much air, then stop and begin sinking, then add too much air to start up again.

"It's kind of like driving a rear-wheel-drive car on ice," says Patterson. "You overcompensate and it gets worse and worse." Try to anticipate the buoy-

ancy growth and stay ahead of it. One way to do that: "Hold the inflate/deflate all the way up," says Snyder. "A lot of divers forget and hold it so low that all the air can't come out."

Your goal is an ascent rate of 30 feet per minute. Ascent rate monitors on many computers can help, though some are slow to react, and audible alarms only tell you when you're already too fast. With a digital depth gauge, the numbers should roll over once every two seconds. Count between feet, as: 98—one thousand one, one thousand two—97—one thousand one, one thousand two—96, etc.

And you can always do math. For example, from 120 feet to the halfway point at 60 feet should take two minutes. If your bottom time is 17 minutes when you start, it should be no less than 19 min-

utes at 60 feet. And from the 15-foot safety stop to the surface should take no less than 30 seconds. (More time is better.)

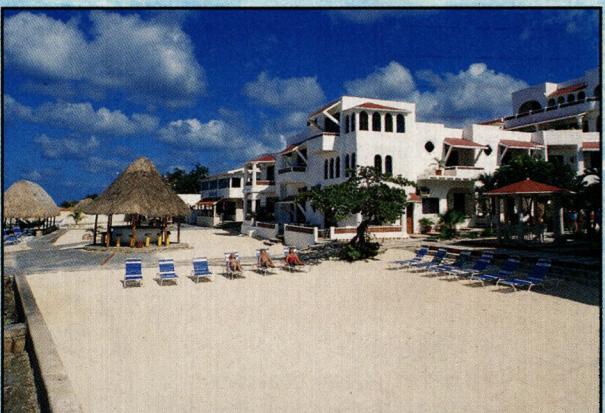
It also helps to practice in advance. On another dive, with plenty of air and no-deco time, try ascending from 30 feet to the surface in no less than one minute. Too fast? Next dive, try again. After a while, you'll know what 30 feet per second feels like.

(STEP SIX)

Pause Halfway Up

A PAUSE AT ABOUT 50 FEET in an ascent from 100 feet gives you the opportunity to make sure your buoyancy is still under control. You'll probably find you are a little too buoyant and will have to vent more air from your BC. Controlling your buoyancy is going to get hard-

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er with every foot from here on up, so it's best to fine-tune it now.

Besides, there's growing evidence that a pause of one minute at half your maximum depth can reduce your risk of DCS. The idea, basically, is that pausing here allows you to breathe out some dissolved nitrogen which, had you continued your ascent, would have formed tiny bubbles that would slow down nitrogen off-gassing. (For more details on deep stops, see "One Minute To Safer Diving," *Scuba Diving*, Dec. '03.)

After pausing one minute at 50 feet, you and your buddy should exchange OK and thumbs-up signals, and start ascending again. Next goal: A safety stop at 15 feet. You need to be especially careful to watch your ascent rate now and be prepared to flare out with your arms and legs if you lose control.

(STEP SEVEN)

Safety Stop

AS YOU PASS THROUGH 20 feet, vent the last few bubbles from your BC and glide to a stop near 15 feet. If you're a little light, try rocking back into the La-Z-Boy recliner position to move the last few air bubbles to your BC's primary exhaust valve. If you have to kick downward to keep your depth, remember the alternate exhaust valve on your BC. Normally on the bottom, it's now at the highest point, and pulling the "rip cord" may release a few bubbles.

Spending at least three minutes here is more important than a blanket rule like "exit with 500 psi," so breathe down to a couple hundred psi if you have to. Three minutes is a minimum. Air permitting, go for five minutes.

(STEP EIGHT)

The Final 15

AFTER WAITING three minutes at 15 feet, many divers pop to the surface, but these last few feet are where the pressure on your body changes fastest. Proportionally, it's the same pressure change you experience ascending from 100 feet to 55 feet. It's hardest to keep your ascent under control here, but also most important. Try to make the ascent last for at least 30 seconds. Be ready to flare out in order to slow down.

Back on the boat, congratulate yourself on accomplishing one of the least-practiced skills in diving and for keeping your ascent rate under control. Says Billingsley, "Even for experienced divers, that's a long ascent without some kind of line." SD

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The Quick Fix

On-site treatments for underwater cuts, scrapes, bites and stings.
BY SELENE YEAGER

THE KIND of marine life interaction you expect on a dive has nothing to do with jellyfish stings, sea urchin sticks and legs that resemble lunchmeat. But all that and more are possible when you come into contact, intentionally or not, with marine life. Following are some fast remedies for some of the most common injuries.

Coral Scrapes

CORAL CUTS happen when you brush up against the sharp calcified outer skeletons of coral. Though they appear innocuous, the wounds generally contain small amounts of animal protein and often become inflamed, swollen, infected sores.

TREATMENT: Irrigate the wound with fresh water. Scrub with soap and water, then flush again. To drive out any remaining coral dust, flush with a mixture of half water, half hydrogen peroxide. Cover with a coating of antibiotic ointment.

Fire Coral Stings

FIRE CORAL ISN'T actually coral at all, but a stinging marine animal of the jellyfish family. You know it's fire coral by the immediate burning sensation that follows contact. You'll also likely develop a raised, itchy rash, and maybe lymph gland swelling.

TREATMENT: Rinse clean with seawater (fresh water makes it hurt more). Rinse with vinegar or rubbing alcohol to reduce the pain. Use tweezers to pick out any remnants, or shave the area. An oral antihistamine like Benadryl

can reduce itching and burning. Or try an over-the-counter pain medication such as Tylenol.

Jellyfish Stings

THERE ARE ROUGHLY 9,000 varieties of jellyfish, and a bump and run with any of them is likely to cause some pain. Their stingers, or nematocysts, are usually located at the end of their tentacles. You'll generally see a raised welted area where contact occurred.

TREATMENT: Swish the wound in salt water. Neutralize any remaining stingers by rinsing with vinegar. Remove any remaining tentacles with tweezers. Shave the area with shaving cream and a razor—or, in a pinch, use a mud paste and clamshell. Rinse with vinegar again. Apply hydrocortisone cream. Keep affected area immobile. Some stings can be very toxic, even fatal, so watch for severe symptoms like unresponsiveness, cardiac arrest, nausea, swelling or trouble breathing that require immediate medical care.

Sea Urchin Sticks

THESE SPINY GLOBE-SHAPED creatures appear benign, but they have toxic spines that can cause painful punctures (and often an infection) should you accidentally bump into one. The spines can come off in the wound, causing further pain. In rare cases, multiple sticks can cause paralysis or even death.

TREATMENT: "Hot water helps inactivate the toxic spines," says ER doc George Bulloch. Flush or immerse the area with water that is very hot, but not scalding, for 30 to 90 minutes. Use tweezers to remove the spines. (Spines



near a joint or on hands or feet may need surgical removal.) Shave area with shaving cream and a razor—or use a mud paste and clamshell. Clean with soap and water, and thoroughly flush the wound. Apply antibiotic ointment; take an anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen for pain. Severe symptoms like breathing trouble require immediate medical care.

Bristleworm Injury

FOUND UNDER ROCKS and corals in tropical areas, the spiny bristleworm can cause injury by biting or stinging you. The result: swelling, burning and pain.

TREATMENT: Flush with vinegar or alcohol to neutralize the venom and relieve pain. To remove bristles, try the old "adhesive tape trick," suggests Bulloch. "Use the sticky side of a piece of tape to pull the stickles off." Take Tylenol or ibuprofen for pain relief. A topical hydrocortisone cream may reduce inflammation.

Lionfish, Scorpionfish and Stonefish Punctures

TROPICAL AND TEMPERATE ocean denizens, these ornate fish have venomous erectile spines on their dorsal,

anal and pelvic fins. Their toxicity ranges from mild (lionfish) to potentially life threatening (stonefish). Accidental contact is usually the culprit in punctures. Symptoms range from intense pain and purple or black skin coloration to systemic reactions such as vomiting, respiratory or cardiac arrest, and worse.

TREATMENT: Use tweezers to remove any remaining spines. Flush or immerse the area with water that is very hot, but not scalding, for 30 minutes. Scrub with soap and water, and thoroughly flush with fresh water. Wrap the affected area snugly with an Ace bandage, but not so tight that you cut off circulation. Seek medical care.

Stingray Strings

BECAUSE THESE MASTER camouflage artists blend in so beautifully, it can

be easy to get stung. The sting can cause bleeding and sharp, intense pain. You may also experience swelling and discoloration of the wound, lymph node swelling and more severe (potentially fatal) systemic reactions.

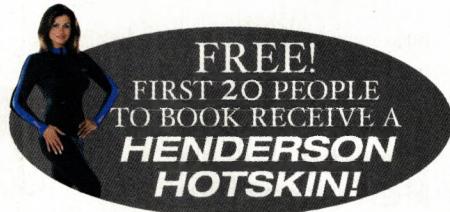
TREATMENT: Irrigate the wound

with fresh water. Soak the affected area in hot water to relieve pain. Use tweezers to remove any part of the stinger that remains. Scrub the wound with soap and water. Apply pressure to the wound with a clean cloth or bandage to stop the bleeding. Seek medical care. 

IT'S AN EMERGENCY IF ...

ANY STING, BITE OR WOUND can have deadly consequences if you have a strong reaction to the toxins or develop a bad infection. After any marine accident, watch for systemic reactions like **severe swelling, dizziness, blurred vision, breathing difficulties, weakness, muscle pain, cold sweat and rapid heartbeat**. If any occur, seek emergency care immediately.

Post-injury, clean the affected wound frequently and keep it dressed with an antibiotic ointment until it heals. If the wound swells, becomes hot, redds or a red streak appears, develops pus or a foul odor, is painful to the touch, you develop a fever or you notice any other signs of infection, seek medical attention.



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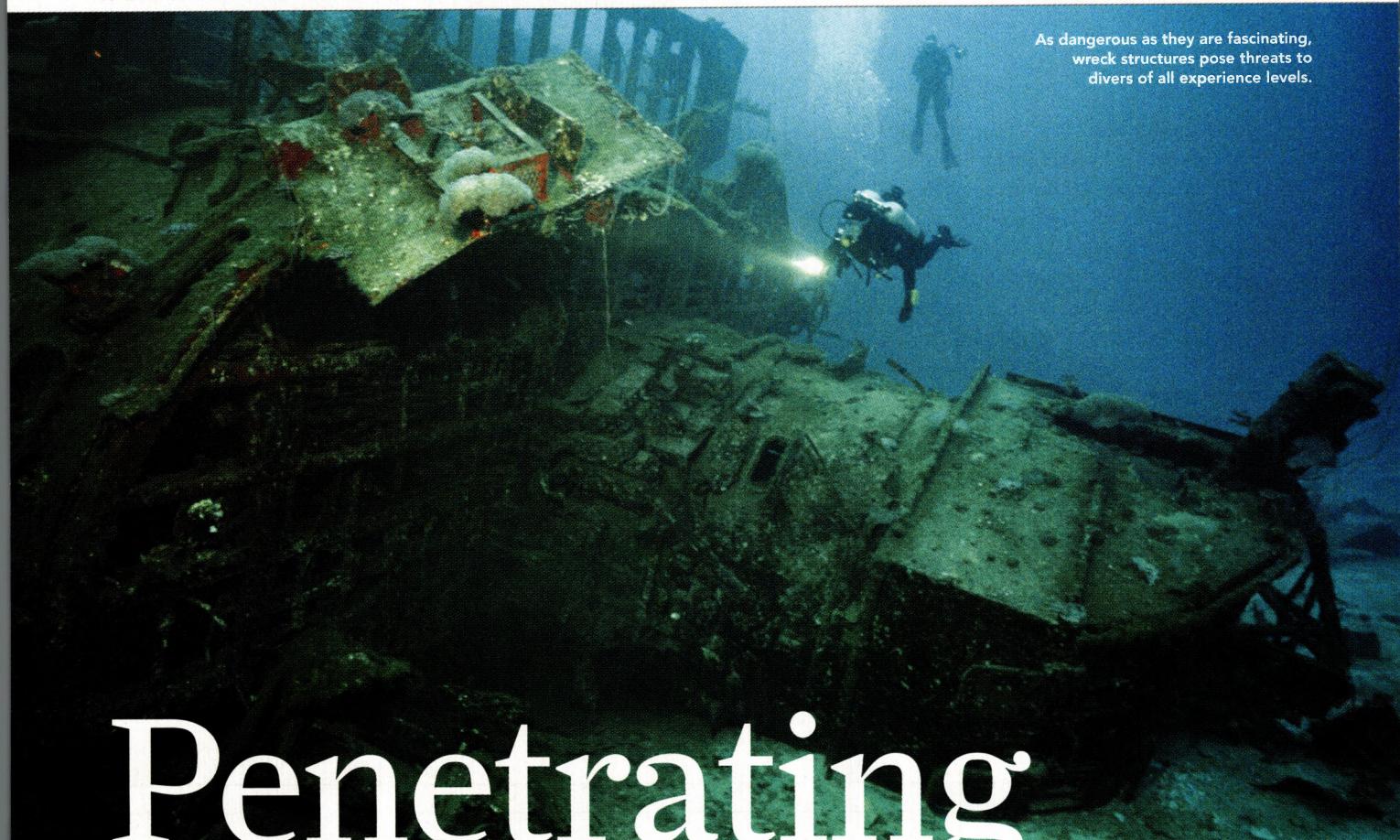


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As dangerous as they are fascinating, wreck structures pose threats to divers of all experience levels.

Penetrating Questions

When diving a wreck, should you go inside? Not without proper training.

BY MICHAEL ANGE

WHETHER IT'S A historic vessel lost to the indignities of war and weather, or an everyday freighter sunk as a diver's playground, there's something about wreck diving that gets a diver's blood bubbling—in a good way. It can also be one of the most dangerous pursuits in diving, especially when divers penetrate a wreck's interior without proper training and gear.

Open Water Wreck Diving

THE FIRST STEP to safely diving wrecks

is entry-level wreck diving certification. Offered by recreational training agencies, this course teaches you to identify and deal with common hazards found when diving the exterior of a shipwreck. These hazards include disorientation, sharp metal edges and entanglement hazards created by rigging, nets and monofilament line.

In addition to making exterior explorations safer, an entry-level wreck diving course is also a good first step to advanced levels of wreck diving. Your training dives in an open-water wreck diving course focus on surveying the wreck to identify all potential hazards and proper navigation techniques to help you maintain a constant awareness of your position on the wreck relative to the ascent line. The metal in the shipwreck can

make your compass virtually useless for navigating, so this part of the class focuses on natural navigation cues.

Limited Penetration

THE NEXT LEVEL OF TRAINING

teaches skills for limited penetration. Limited-penetration divers typically use traditional recreational equipment, although some also carry a wreck reel for primary navigation. While limited-penetration courses are offered by most recreational and technical training agencies, the definition of limited penetration is not clear-cut. Most technical agencies define limited penetration as swimming into simple swim-through areas where the risk of entanglement and entrapment is minimal and the diver can remain inside the natural light zone created by the entry area. Limited-penetration divers should never rely on light streaming through portholes or other nonpassable openings and should always

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keep the entry/exit point in easy view.

The biggest potential hazard for the limited-penetration diver is loss of vision. The clear water inside the wreck will nearly always be clouded by rust particles, silt and other sediments when you turn to exit. Poor buoyancy control, poor fin technique and even your exhaust bubbles will cause this diminished visibility by kicking up sand and silt, and dislodging sediments from rusting steel plates overhead.

These clouds of silt and sediment can range from a minor annoyance to a disorienting hazard that completely robs you of the ability to see. To alleviate these problems, limited-penetration divers are trained to penetrate only open passages that have large openings for access and preferably more than one opening for entry and exit.

Full Penetration

THE MOST ADVANCED FORM of wreck diving is full-penetration or technical wreck diving. At this level, divers are trained to penetrate to any level of the ship provided that the structure is stable and the dive is within the skill and experience level of the diver.

The penetration diver must have skills very similar to those used in cave diving, and he assumes that every wreck dive will be a decompression dive. Therefore, most training programs go beyond penetration skill to include gas management techniques and the use of decompression gases to facilitate staged decompression stops during the ascent. This training often includes use of a lift bag or surface marker to allow the dive boat to track the diver's location if he is forced to decompress while drifting.

In addition to a stage tank and a surface marker, the penetration diver will replace his primary cylinder with either a high-capacity (98 to 120 cubic feet) single cylinder with an H valve or a twin cylinder configuration utilizing an isolat-

tion manifold with two regulator connection outlets. Either of these tank configurations will allow the diver to both carry more gas and to carry a complete, separate regulator system consisting of a first stage and second stage connected by a five- to seven-foot-long hose.

If the diver should find himself inside the wreck and experience a catastrophic failure in one regulator system (such as an uncontrolled second stage free flow), the diver can simply shut down the malfunctioning regulator and switch to the backup. This will allow the diver to preserve his gas supply for exiting the wreck without having to share gas with a buddy. If the situation becomes even worse and the diver finds his primary gas supply completely exhausted, the seven-foot hose allows the diver's buddy to share gas even if the divers have to pass through restricted passageways one behind the other.

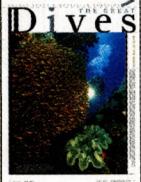
Penetration divers also use a conservative gas management technique called the rule of thirds. In very simple terms, this means that the diver uses one-third of his gas as he swims away from the exit point, one-third of his gas to return to the exit point, and saves one-third of his gas to deal with any emergencies that may occur.

The full-penetration diver will use wreck reels and line markers to safely navigate inside the wreck. During the course of penetration, the divers will survey the structure of the wreck to look for loose or unstable structures and alternative paths to open water should the primary entry route become impassable.

Technical wreck dives can be done on any intact structure; however, divers pursuing this passion frequently discover that deeper wrecks offer the most potential. Therefore, most technical wreck divers will also get training in extended-range or tri-mix diving in order to access wrecks in the 150- to 330-foot range. SD

Depth

1



CANNIBAL ROCK, INDONESIA, P.

17 • Accommodations range from hotels on nearby islands to luxury live-aboards. For a list of dive charters and live-aboards in Indonesia, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder.

KICKER ROCK, GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, P. 18 • You never know what you'll encounter at Kicker Rock. Currents usually aren't strong, and even snorkelers stop for a visit. **DIVE CHARTERS >** Galapagos Aggressor I and Galapagos Aggressor II, www.aggressor.com; Lamer Law, www.galapagosdiving.com; Peter Hughes' Sky Dancer, www.peter-hughes.com.

THE CHIMNEY, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS, P. 20 • The Chimney is seven miles north of Virgin Gorda, so you'll need a boat to get there. The usually calm conditions and shallow depth (45 feet, tops) make this an easy dive. For a list of British Virgin Islands dive operators, plus travel guides and more, go to www.scubadiving.com and click on TripFinder.

2



COZUMEL TRAVEL GUIDE, P. 36 • WATER CONDITIONS >

Water temperatures vary from 75 degrees in winter to 85 degrees in summer, but you can count on 100 feet of visibility just about year-round. **CLIMATE >** Cozumel averages a balmy year-round temperature of about 80 degrees. During the May-to-October rainy season, expect afternoon thundershowers. **GETTING THERE >** Daily flights from Houston, Miami and New York. Commuter flights from Cancun are scheduled several times daily. Inexpensive ferry boats from Playa Del Carmen run from before dawn to well after midnight seven days a week. **DOCUMENTS >** Proof of citizenship; either a valid passport or the combination of a birth certificate and driver's license is required. **GETTING AROUND >** Shuttle vans or rental cars are the only transportation from the airport and make the circuit to all the hotels. Cabs are readily available at all hotels, or you can wave one off the street. You can also rent jeeps, cars and scooters. **LANGUAGE >** Spanish, though English is widely spoken. **ELECTRICITY >** 110 volts/60 cycles. **TIME >** Cozumel is in the Central time zone and doesn't observe daylight-saving time.

STEVE SIMONSEN

3



DRIVE & DIVE: GREAT LAKES WRECKS, P. 43

Most Great Lakes' dive charters do not schedule trips between November and April, though certified ice divers say diving these lakes in winter is awesome. For the rest of us, the dive season is from May to October; the best visibility (from 50 to 70 feet) occurs in May and June, not long after the ice melts. Early July through late September, when the water is somewhat warmer, can also be good, with up to 50 feet of visibility. You'll need a dry suit or, at the very least, an excellent quarter-inch full wetsuit, hood, boots and gloves. By July or August, the Great Lakes have often warmed up enough (60 to 65 degrees near the surface) so that many divers prefer wearing a wetsuit, though the northern half of the Great Lakes does not warm up as much as the southern half. During the cold "shoulder" times of the dive season, some charter operators require that you dive in a dry suit. **DIVE OPERATORS** > Annie Falconer, Ducks Dive Charters & Cottages, Picton, Ontario, (613) 476-3764, e-mail: ducksdive@attcanada.net, web: www.ducksdive.com. • Wolfe Islander II, Limestone Dive Center, Kingston, Ontario, (800) 286-DIVE, e-mail: Charters@divekingston.com, web: www.divekingston.com. • Dean Richmond, Osprey Charters, Barcelona, N.Y., (716) 326-2773, cell: (716) 753-6565, e-mail: osprey@cecomet.net, web: www.osprey-dive.com. • Merida, Discovery Dive Charters & Tours, Cleveland, Ohio, (216) 481-5771 or (216) 692-3483, web: www.discoverydive.com. • Mary Alice B., Lakeshore Charters, Lexington, Mich., (810) 359-8660, e-mail: divelog@greatlakes.net, web: www.greatlakes.net/~divelog. • Sandusky, Straits Scuba Center, St. Ignace, Mich., (810) 329-3596, web: www.straitsscuba.com; Scuba North, Traverse City, Mich., (231) 947-2520, e-mail:

4



GEAR REVIEW, P. 85

MANUFACTURER Product Name	PRICE	WARRANTY	MADE IN	TYPE	DIMENSIONS IN. (HxWxD)	MATERIALS	CLOSURES
DRY BAGS							
AKONA AKB724 Dry Shoulder Bag	\$85	2 yrs.	China	Water-resistant	11x15x6	PU-coated 600-denier nylon	Zippers
MARINE SPORTS Dry Pak	\$24.94	1 yr.	China	Water-proof	19x12	10-oz. vinyl	Fold-and-roll
SEASOFT SCUBA DryBag	\$129.99	2 yrs.	USA	Water-resistant	36x17x11	Polymer-impregnated vinyl	Zipper
STAHL SAC Bone Dry Storage Bag	\$89	Lifetime	USA	Water-proof	21x10x8	PU-coated 840-denier nylon	Zip-dry seal/fold-and-roll
TRIPLE-L Sahara	\$93	2-yr. Limited	Vietnam	Submersible	20x16x7	PVC-coated 840-denier nylon	Zipper
USIA Multi-Purpose Bag	\$229	5-yr. Limited	USA	Submersible	10.5x8x3.5	PU-coated 400-denier pack cloth	Zipper
XS SCUBA Sedona Large Duffel	\$90	Limited Lifetime	China	Water-proof	24x9x11	PU-coated 600-denier nylon	Fold-and-roll
DRY BOXES							
OTTER PRODUCTS 6500 Series Dry Box	\$65.05; \$75.55 (w/ foam)	Lifetime	USA	Submersible	7x13x11	FG-reinforced ABS plastic	Latches
PELICAN PRODUCTS 1500 Protector Case	\$145.95	Lifetime	USA	Submersible	7x19x13	Copolymer polypropylene	Latches

FOR MORE INFO:

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www.akona.com

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www.marinesportsproducts.com

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Charters. • Frank O'Connor, Jim Robinson, The Shoreline Resort & Charters, Ellison Bay, Wis., (920) 854-2606, e-mail: front@theshorelineresort.com, web: www.theshorelineresort.com. • Bermuda, Grand Island Charters, Munising, Mich., (906) 387-4477, e-mail: plindqui@jamadots.com, web: www.shipwrecktours.com; North Star Charters, Munising, Mich., (906) 387-5900 or (906) 452-6499, e-mail: llindqui@up.net, web: www.lakesuperiordiving.com.

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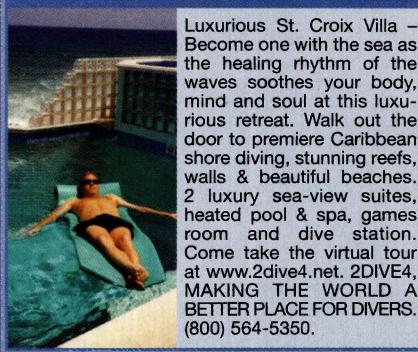
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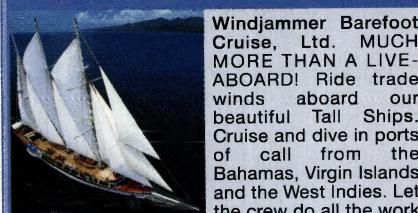
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LOOK



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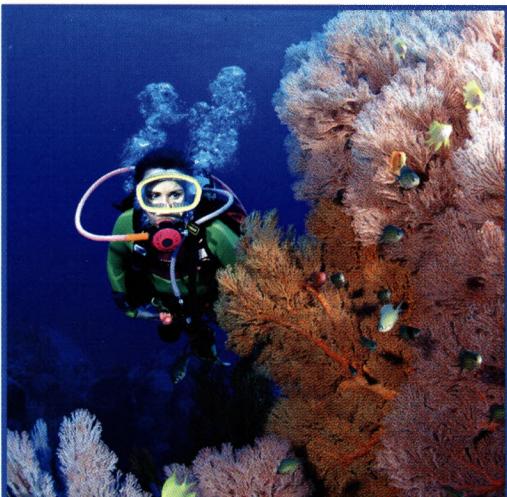
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